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ABSTRACT

These supplemental readings are part of a total packet of learning materials on the heritage of Southern agrarians. The readings are prefaced by a story of Southern life told in pictures. The primary source readings cover the following topics: (1) Farmers Unions, (2) Farm Tenancy, (3) Recovery Programs of the Roosevelt Administration, (4) Cotton Economy, (5) The Plantation Labor System, and (6) The Great Depression. (Author/MK)

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Ethnic Heritage:
Supplemental Readings

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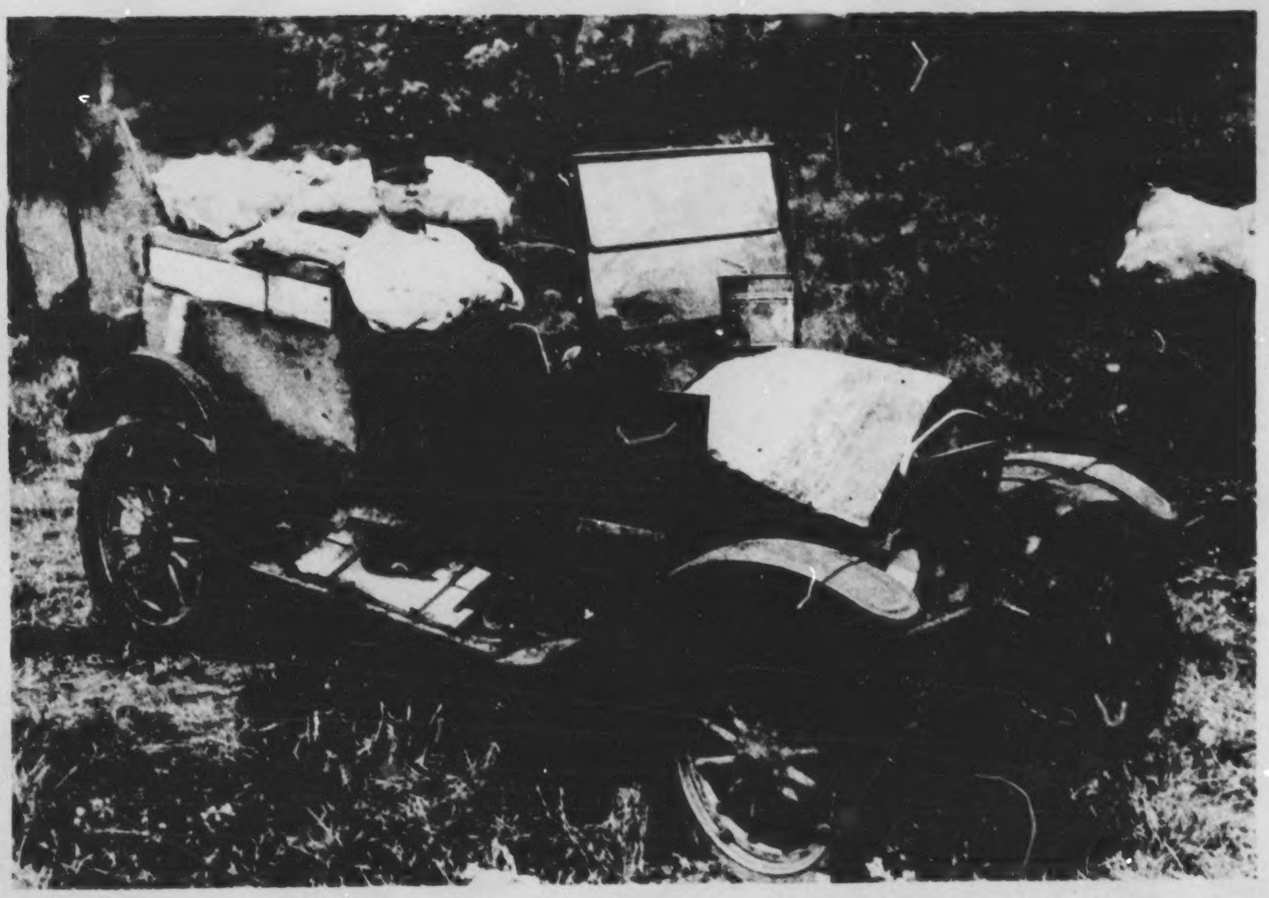
THE YOUNG

THE PROUD



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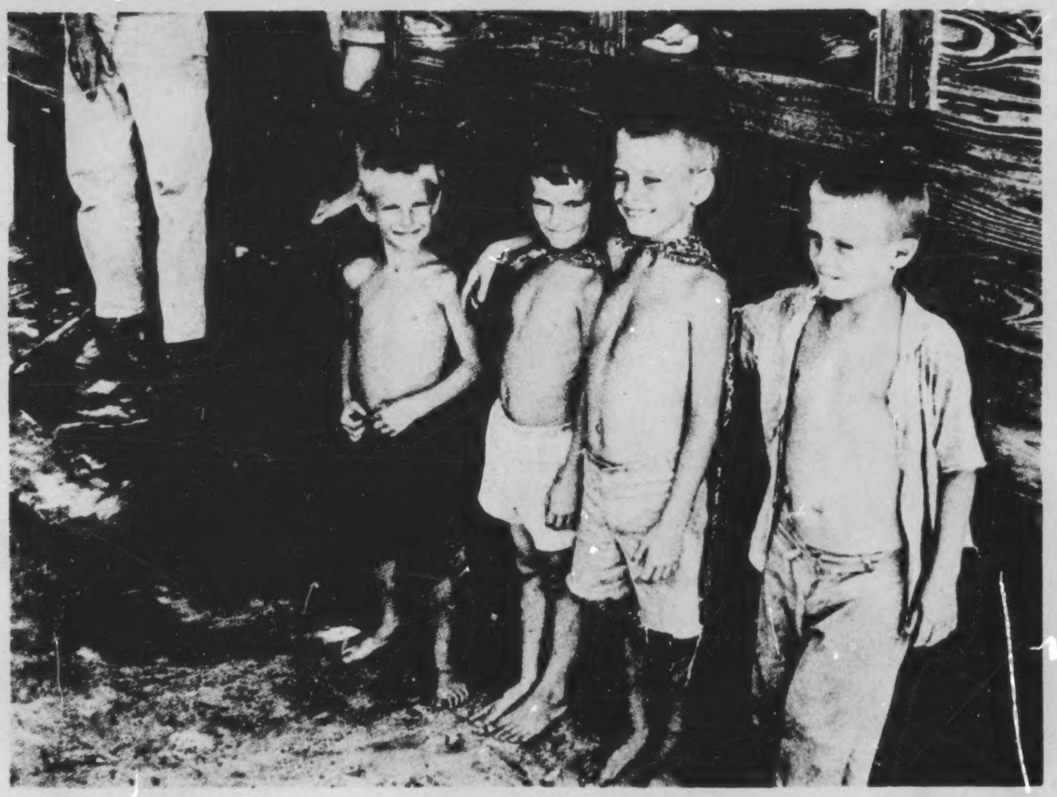

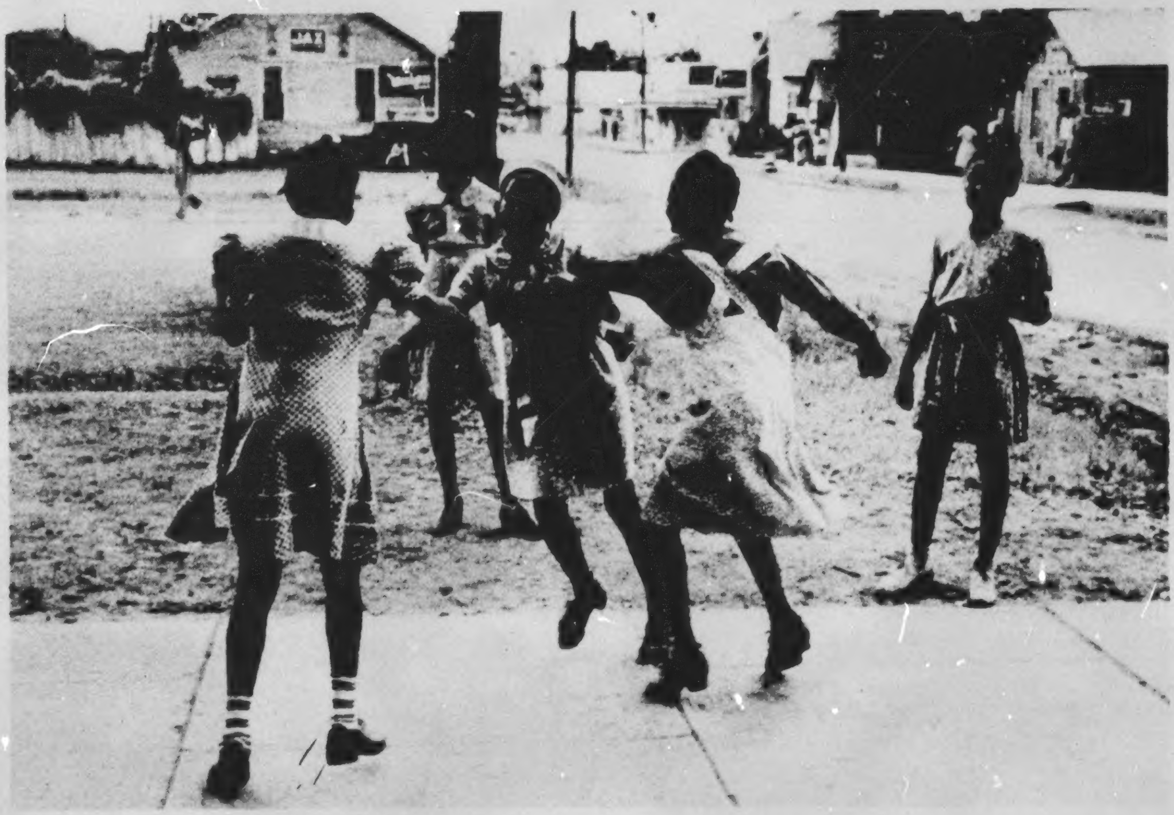

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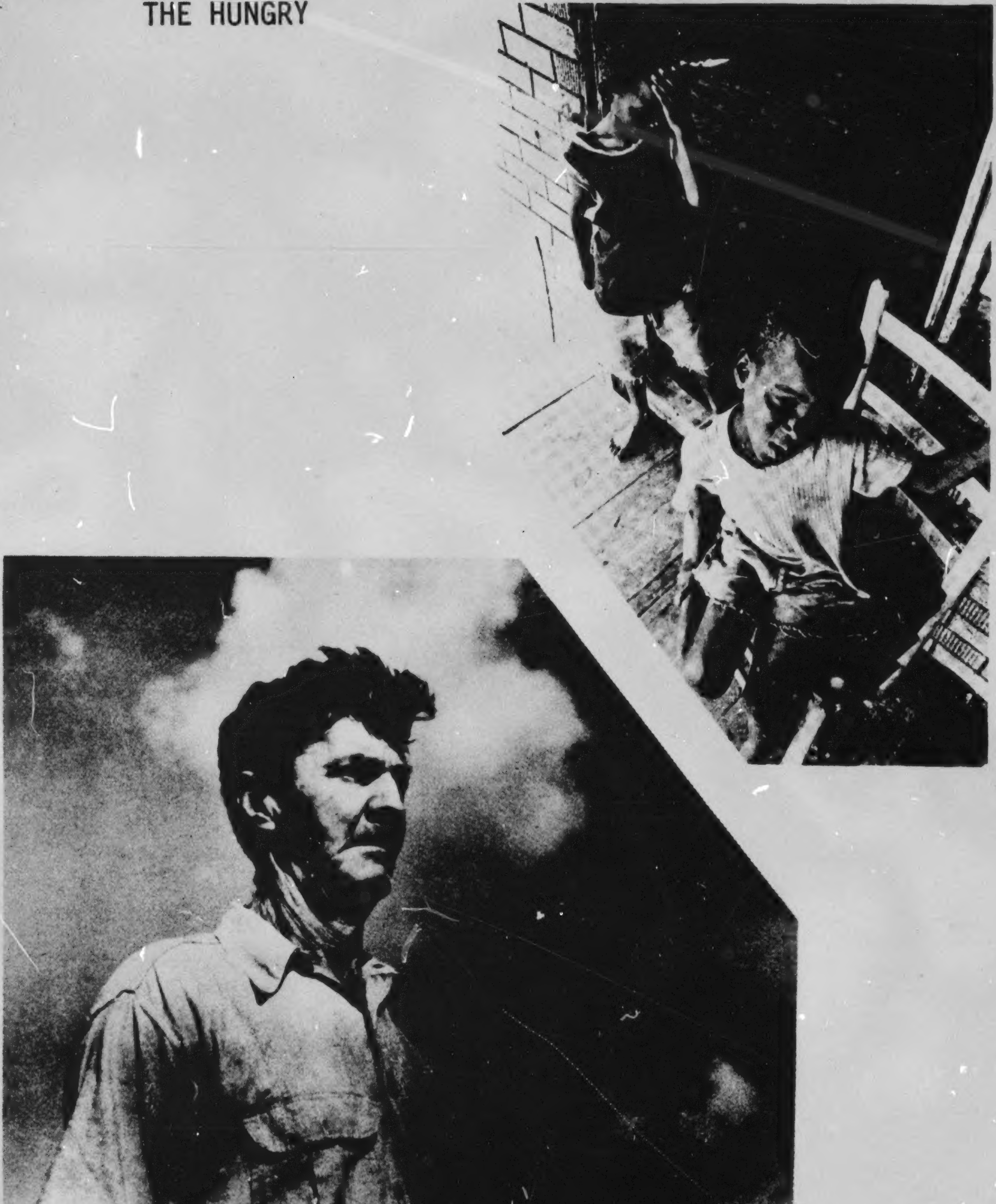


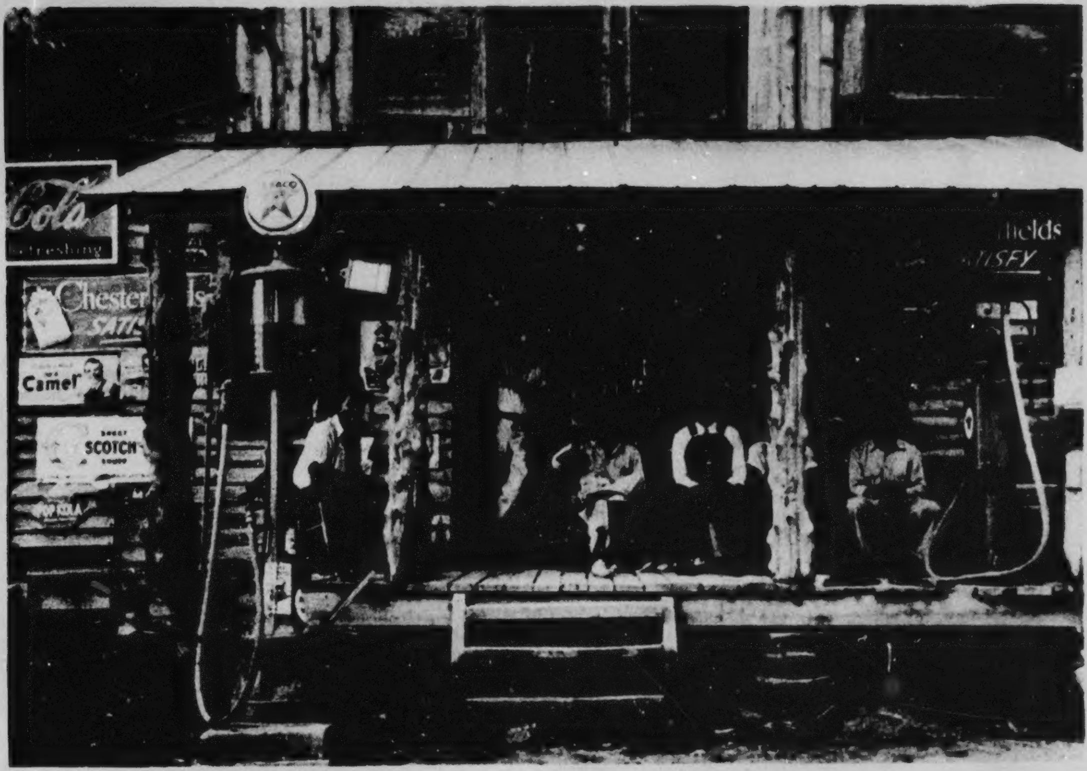
THE DISTRESSFUL

THE ACCEPTING

THE SPIRITUAL

REPENT YE SHALL ALL PERISH
JESUS IS COMING SOON

THE CHANGING


Cola
Refreshing
Chester
SATI
Camel
SCOTCH
POP COLA
hields
TISFY

ORAL HISTORY PRESENTATION

RACE RELATIONS
IN THE
SOUTHERN FARMERS TENANT UNION

By: H. L. Mitchell
Co-Founder

Introduction of H. L. Mitchell by Dr. Nancy Weiss
Department of History
Princeton University
April 4, 1973 at 7:30 P. M., McCosh Hall

This evening our guest is Mr. H. L. Mitchell, a founder and the first Executive Secretary of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. The Union was founded in 1934 on a cotton plantation in Eastern Arkansas and during the 1930's he organized agricultural workers in the South, in the New Deal years. In the 1940's, 50's and 60's he helped organize rural people in the midwest, the far west and the east coast as well. He has served as an advisor to several U. S. and also specialized agencies of the United Nations.

Most recently Mr. Mitchell has been head of the Southern Rural Welfare Association, organized by surviving members and friends of the historic Southern Tenant Farmers Union.

He is going to speak to us on race relations in the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. He is also going to show us a film and he will tell you about that.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you very much Nancy Weiss.

NORMAN THOMAS

The man most responsible for the formation of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union was a graduate of Princeton University.

Norman Thomas was the first man to call attention to the plight of the black and white sharecroppers on the cotton plantations. The late Socialist Leader advised some of us to help the sharecroppers organize.

HOWARD KESTER

There was another person who came to help. He was a student of Princeton Theological Seminary in the 20's. He once preached a sermon at Millers Chapel in which he denounced some of the students for being members of the Ku Klux Klan. He also took issue with one of the professors who had spoken for the Manufacturers Association against Child Labor legislation. Howard Kester also committed some other crimes of that day, in that he advocated the admission of blacks to Princeton University. After his sermon some students planned to throw him in the lake. Needless to say Kester was not encouraged to return to Princeton. He came South to the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University and became a southern preacher without a church. Finally Howard Kester came to work with the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and remained throughout its formative years (1935-1940). Howard Kester wrote the book "Revolt Among the Sharecroppers". It had been out of print for many years. It is now available. In the new introduction to this book, Professor August Meier of Kent State University says "Howard Kester decribes a rare phenomenon, a truly inter-racial movement among the dispossessed of the South, both black and white."

WHAT IS A SHARECROPPER

I am sometimes asked, tell us what is a sharecropper. There are few left these days. Most have been displaced from the land, most now are in the cities, others have become migrant workers, and follow the crops with the sun. Others work for these big Conglomerates that have found agriculture and government subsidies so profitable. The Conglomerates own thousands of acres. Tenneco Oil is one and another is Coca Cola. But in 1932 there were five million white folks and 3½ million black folks working on the shares down South. The sharecroppers system developed right after the Civil War. The black slaves had been freed, but the government did not give them land on which to live. The land owners had land but no money to pay the ex-slaves wages. So instead of receiving wages the men agreed to plant, cultivate and harvest cotton. The landlord advanced them groceries on a credit. When the cotton was harvested, a settlement was made. Each man was to get one half of what the crop sold for. But once the deductions were made, usually there was little left for the cropper. In many respects the sharecropping system was a continuation of slavery. It was within this context that the Southern Tenant

Farmers Union was organized.

STFU FORMED

It was a hot night in July in 1934 when 18 men, 11 white and 7 black met in a broken down schoolhouse on a cotton plantation in Arkansas to talk about what they could do to protect themselves and to secure their rightful share of the government subsidies being paid to growers of cotton to restrict production.

My friend, Clay East and I arrived at this meeting late. We had heard rumors of talk among sharecroppers of forming a neck tie party and hanging an obnoxious plantation owner. However, a decision had been reached to form a legal organization. The chairman, Alvin Nunnally, a sharecropper was saying as we arrived that we need an organization like the F. E. C. U. of A. for all sharecroppers and tenant farmers.

KU KLUX KLAN

The next man to speak was a burly white sharecropper, as old or older than I am now. Burt Williams was telling how his "Pappy" had ridden with the Ku Klux Klan and had helped drive the last Republican office holder out of adjoining Crittenden County. Williams was saying that we needed an organization like Nunnally talked about and one all that could belong to. He said, "There is Preacher Smith (who was black) who lives next door to me and no man ever had a better neighbor. He then asked each white man if he did believe that there should be only one organization for all black and white sharecropperr. Each man nodded his head "Yes" or said "You are right". Every one knew that if the whites alone organized they would be replaced by blacks and if the blacks alone organized the whites would take their places on the plantations. After the whites had all agreed, Burt Williams turned to the blacks who were sitting in the back and said, "What do you men think." For about a minute no one answered. Then a man got up, he had a beautiful speaking voice. Isaac Shaw said, "Gentlemen, you have made the right decision. You have decided to have a legal organization for all sharecroppers, black as well as white. As long as we stick to these principles, this organization will last." Ike Shaw had been a member of the all black Progressive Farmers Association in Philips County, Arkansas, about 25 miles from where the present meeting was being held. Shaw said the group organized, hired a lawyer and tried to get a better price for their cotton. There were a lot of meetings being held out on the plantations. The white folks became alarmed. The Sheriff and a posse was sent out to break up a meeting. In an exchange of gun fire, several men were killed. Thereafter, the black leaders were hunted down and slaughtered, in what history calls the Elaine Race Riots. I afterwards learned that Ike Shaw though he could speak English very well, could neither read nor write. I often say that when Martin Luther King Jr. was a very small boy a group of black and white sharecroppers adopted the policy of nonviolence. It was a necessity. We knew that our black members would be slaughtered as they were in the Elaine affair, if we met violence with violence. We also realized that sharecroppers had no political or economic power and our only hope was an appeal to the conscience of America.

WHY THE SHARECROPPERS ORGANIZED

The reason for black and white sharecroppers being ready to organize was simply that they wanted their share of the government money paid for plowing up every third row of cotton. They were not getting the share promised under the Agricultural Adjustment Act, and they were being evicted from the land. They probably could not have organized an inter-racial movement in Alabama or Mississippi, but north eastern Arkansas was different, the people, the landlords and tenants were all new to that country. The paternalism of old South had not developed there. Eastern Arkansas swamps had been drained by that great engineer Dr. Arthur E. Morgan, the first chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority. Last November Dr. Morgan wrote me "While doing that drainage work, I had dreams of that rich land becoming the site of prosperous homes for many farmers. Instead the timber interests turned it into tenant farms, whose operators worked this rich land for a very meager income. You can imagine my disappointment at seeing the outcome of my drainage work". Dr. Morgan sent me his book called "Dams and Other Disasters", published in 1971. Dr. Morgan is over 90 years of age and still most active.

SHARECROPPERS GO TO WASHINGTON

One of the first things we did was file a lawsuit in an effort to enforce the rights of sharecroppers. But, hundreds were being evicted from the land. Many of them were evicted because they had joined the Union. Nothing was being done so our members took up collections among themselves and among their friends to send a delegation to Washington. Two white and two black sharecroppers were elected to go see the Secretary of Agriculture, that great liberal of his day, Henry Wallace, no relation to "Little George" in Alabama. I was selected to go because I had a car and also had once been to Washington.

We left Arkansas early one morning and drove two days and nights straight through to Washington. I did every bit of the driving, none of the other fellows even knew how to drive and we got to Washington early in the morning and of course, we didn't know where to go, so we spent the rest of the night in the car parked on the street, near the Department of Agriculture. About 7:30 in the morning we went over to see Mr. Wallace but none of the Washington farmers were at work. The guard at the front of the building told us that no one came to work until about 9 o'clock. So we went over to the Washington Monument, but that was closed too. We had breakfast at a grocery store where we bought some bologna, cheese, crackers and cokes, about the same thing we lived on for the past two days enroute. About 9:30 we went back to the Department of Agriculture and the guard told us Mr. Wallace's office was Room 204 at the head of the stairs.

We walked up and I told the receptionist who we were and that we wanted to see the Secretary. She asked if we had an appointment to see anyone. I didn't know what to say. She said Mr. Wallace was in conference.

FIRST SIT DOWN

She said he could not be disturbed. Then our vice president, E. B. McKinney, a Negro, said, "Ma'am, thats all right, we will just sit down here and wait until Mr. Wallace gets thru." With that all of us sat down. I guess this was the first "sit down" to ever occur in the Department of Agriculture. After a few minutes, I thought of a letter I had addressed to Paul Appleby, the Under Secretary. The receptionist went to see Mr. Appleby and Paul came out to meet us and then he persuaded Secretary Wallace to come out to see us. We had a conference in his outer office. We asked him to send a real investigator to Arkansas to see about the sharecroppers who would not white wash the cotton planters who were evicting families so they could get the government subsidy payments under AAA. Mr. Wallace agreed to send an investigator down there.

He said he had the ideal person to send to Arkansas. A lawyer who had been involved in the Al Capone case. Al Capone was the gangster the Government convicted for violation of the Income Tax Law. Mr. Wallace told us to say to our members that we had met with him and something was going to be done. Greatly elated, we returned to Arkansas

MINISTER JAILED AS ANARCHIST

Ward H. Rodgers, a young minister was chairman of the meeting where the delegation was going to report. We thought maybe we might have 50 or 60 people attending. So many folks were there you couldn't even get to the hall so we adjourned the meeting up to the town square. Rodgers committed the crime of referring to a Negro as "Mister". In those days it was a crime to call a Negro "Mister". You could call him Professor, Doctor or Reverend, anything but don't call him "Mister". McKinney, who was vice president of the Union was a Negro. Rodgers made the mistake of asking, "is Mr. McKinney in the crowd." "Will Mr. McKinney come to the platform," and he said it over and over again. I remember as I walked up, he had just repeated that and Fred Stafford, the prosecuting attorney was standing on the edge of the crowd with a stenographer with a notebook taking down everything. He said, "did you hear him call that nigger Mister" and an old white sharecropper said, "I'd a hell of a lot rather call McKinney Mister than you." Rodgers had a visit the night before from a delegation of plantation owners and the local superintendent of schools. Rodgers was teaching adults to read, write, and figure. He was on the Adult Education Program of the WPA. He was told in no uncertain terms that if he didn't get out of the county, that he might find himself strung up on a telephone pole. Without explaining anything, Rodgers said, "if I wanted to do so, I could lead a lynch mob to lynch any plantation owner in Poinsett County."

When Rodgers said that about 1500 hats went up in the air. They yelled, "Come on, let's go get them," I knew Rodgers had said the wrong thing so I took the platform. I was a little excited too. I said, "Ward Rodgers is staying at my house, if anybody gets his head in a pillow case and comes around my place, he's gonna get the hell shot out of him." Of course, I didn't have a shotgun. After the meeting was over everybody nearly left town. Rodgers stayed around and he was arrested and put in jail. Our lawyer said that they threw the law books at Rodgers. He was charged with anarchy, blasphemy, barratry and other things. In case you don't know what barratry is, that's something that they usually charge lawyers with doing, stirring up strife among neighbors so they can collect a fee.

They kept Rodgers in jail a few days and then let him out on bond. There was a hearing before a Justice of the Peace who sentenced Rodgers to one year in jail and a $500 fine. We appealed the case and after it was set for trial a few times it was dismissed. Rodgers was not guilty of any violation of any law but just sounded wrong. The woman lawyer Mrs. Myers sent by the Secretary of Agriculture attended the hearing and was horrified at the proceeding. She made a thorough investigation and returned to Washington.

THE MYERS REPORT

While Henry Wallace did send the investigator to Arkansas, he then permitted her report to be surpressed. One of his men called the Mary Conner Myers Report on sharecroppers "Too hot to print". The Secretary of Agriculture refused to enter into our lawsuit to enforce the provisions applying to sharecroppers rights. We lost our case. A reign of terror started. The night riders were organized, men were jailed, beaten, homes shot into, and churches were burned. At least two men were killed. Then the Union turned to economic action and we won our first battle. The plantation owners cut the wages to be paid to cotton pickers. Unions do not get organized if the employers do not do something stupid.

COTTON PICKERS STRIKE

Our first strike was by cotton pickers in the fall of 1935. The planters had announced that they were going to pay 40¢ per 100 lbs that fall. A good cotton picker could pick about 200 lbs. a day. That meant 80¢ a day for 10 or 12 hours work. We called a meeting of all of our local unions and decided to demand $1.00 per hundred publically, but to take 75¢ per 100 if we could get it, or a $1.50 per day. It was decided to go out and pick for 30 days at the 40¢ rate, to buy some beans and fat back so the pickers could all stay out at the time cotton was open and ready for the harvest and every picker was needed. Then one night all over three counties, handbills appeared on the front porches of the planters; on barn doors and fence posts, telling every one to stay out of the fields until the wage rates were up to $1.00. In about 10 days, the planters were offering 75¢ everywhere and in some places the Union men got $1.00 they had asked for. One man said he was going to start a rumor that someone got shot for picking cotton while the strike was on. The same rumor started in three counties and sheriffs and their deputies spent days investigating and nothing happened. No one had been shot. Everybody just remained at home.

The sharecroppers also said that fellow Mitchell came over in an airplane and scattered the handbills, just how I placed them on plantation owners front porches or nailed them on barns or telephone poles, they didn't say.

After the cotton picker strike was won, we had great influx of members in the STFU. Next year, we tried to set a wage of $1.50 per day or 15¢ an hour for 10 hours work.

THE MARCH OF TIME

For about 10 years, starting in the mid 30's Time-Life, Inc. owned by Henry Luce, produced very short films.

Every 4 or 6 weeks a documentary like this was shown in the movie houses throughout the country. This was one about the problems and the plight of the sharecroppers. The photographer for this particular issue of the March of Time is the famous Walker Evans, who, with James Agee, produced the book which is an American classic of the 30's called "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men", about three tenant farm families in Alabama.

TIME MARCHES ON

The movie is real and it is a reenactment of the events that occured, including the flogging of Claude Williams, a minister, and Willie Sue Blagden, a social worker from Memphis. Williams, like me, came from west Tennessee, some 40 or 50 miles away and we were termed outside agitators. Regardless of what Governor Futrell said, we proved that peonage existed in Arkansas. We got a conviction of one of the men who broke up marches and beat up people. His name was Paul D. Peacher, a deputy sheriff. He was convicted of holding 13 men in slavery and given a $4,000 fine and a prison sentence of 2 years. This was the first such conviction under the 1875 civil rights statute or at least one of the first modern day convictions. The governor's statement in the "March of Time, that we were outside agitators was an error. All of our people lived in that area. I thought when we first started that I would just help them get started and then I would get away but I have been at it ever since, in one form or other.

THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON FARM TENANCY

Demonstrations of people must occur before governments ever move. Because of the kind of thing you saw in the film, the President's Commission on Farm Tenancy was created. President Roosevelt acted because of the pressure that had been aroused through such events as this.

You may be interested in how we got representation on the Commission. Gardner Jackson heard about it and went to see one of Secretary Wallace's men. Jackson was told "You wouldn't put a chicken on a poultry board, would you?" He threatened to call a press conference and quote the official. Jackson was asked to submit names of three STFU members. He named Kester, Mitchell and Blackstone. They decided Kester was to articulate, Mitchell knew too much, therefore appointed Blackstone.

Blackstone was a cotton patch preacher, as most of the leaders of our Union were. Most of them were Baptist, Methodist, and sometimes Holiness, both black and white.

THE FIRST RURAL POVERTY PROGRAM

Out of the President's Commission came the first rural poverty program of our time. It was called the Farm Security Administration. All of the farm projects and the experimental things that had happened under the New Deal were put together under this single agency.

This rural poverty program gave help to 900,000 farm families, most of them in the South. This was thru rehabilitation loans, housing projects for migratory farm workers. Some 40,000 families secured loans to buy farms. There were numerous experimental projects, some of them that the STFU recommended in its Minority Report to the President's Commission on cooperative farming programs.

STFU MEMBERS NUMBER 31,000 in 1937-38

Throughout the 30's, our organization, the STFU grew and spread into the adjoining states. At one time, we had 31,000 members, according to Don Grubbs, who studied the records and wrote "Cry from the Cotton." The high point was in 1937 and 1938. Then when World War II came the first government program to be ended was the Farm Security Administration. Some of the other projects that were helping to do good for some of the rural people of the South were likewise victims of World War II.

STFU SURVIVES WORLD WAR II

Our organization basically remained in eastern Arkansas, where it originated on the cotton plantations. It spread into southeastern Missouri, a little in Mississippi and a little in Alabama. We once had quite an organization among the Indians, blacks and white of Oklahoma and in Texas. The 1930's were a beginning of many of our present day problems. The displacement of people, both white and black, from the land occured. Our organization did seek to develop a program that would have made our lives better (here) in the South than in the cities. In time, that became impossible because each year more and more of the people were displaced. We were considered by some folks as revolutionists, largely because we formed an organization of black and white people at the bottom of the economic heap. We also sought to redistribute the land. We wanted to see the promises made, fulfilled, when the chattel slaves were freed in 1865. Only we knew that 40 acres and a mule were not the solution in the 1930's. Mechanization of agriculture was in the offing.

THE MIGRATION PLAN

The STFU in cooperation with another union in New Jersey worked out a significant organized migration plan under which 10,000 STFU members were placed on jobs in food processing and on farms. In connection with the movement, I want to mention a great guy whom I know in this area. He is Leon B. Schachter, a vice president of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of N. A. AFL-CIO. Leon came to this country from Austria in the 1930's just before the Nazi occupation of Austria. He also heads perhaps the largest single union in New Jersey. It includes employees of Seabrook Farms, the first organization of farm workers under a union shop contract and it has been for over 30 years.

THE UNION GOES WEST

I often talk to groups like this and I remind them that for 31 years we have been at war, either hot war, or cold war. You people who came up during this period have known no other life. One of the chief architects of that cold war is a man whom I crossed swords with in California in 1949. At the end of

World War II, we changed our name to National Farm Labor Union and chartered by the AF of L, we started organizing in California. Incidentially, the present movement there is an outgrowth and a continuation of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union.

We had a strike on a big farm, the DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation Ranch with 18,000 acres and 1,100 people. In 1947 it started and lasted about a year and a half. The Hollywood Film Unions made a movie called "Poverty in the Valley of Plenty", which by the way, is quite good. I wish I could show it. It was outlawed because of circumstances that prevented us from contesting a lawsuit. We didn't have the money to fight in the courts and we had to agree to withdraw it from circulation. Then years later, the AFL-CIO showed it and had to pay thousands of dollars to the corporation, all because they would not spend a few hundred to fight the case in court. But anyway, when that movie was made, things happened that may interest you. The Screen Actors Guild gave the sum of $5,000 to help make that movie, and guess who signed the check, Ronald Reagan, now Governor of California. He was president of the Screen Actors Union at that time. He's been so far out in the left field, and he's back on the right, way over there, of course, now. I didn't go to see him about the money, one of our people, Hank Hasiwar went to see him. Hank says he had a time trying to persuade Ronnie that we weren't Communists disguised as trade unionists. He finally convinced him, otherwise, Reagan probably wouldn't have signed the check.

MR. NIXON AT BAKERSFIELD

I showed this movie to the House Labor and Education Committee in Washington early in 1948. I asked them to appoint a committee to make an investigation of the DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation strike conditions. The strike had then been going on over a year. They did appoint a sub-committee and sent it out to California to hold hearings. On this committee was a young Congressman from California. He got on this committee to support his corporation farm friends. He proceeded to treat the members of the Union who were there as witnesses, as if they were criminals. He asked all kinds of questions that they couldn't answer; about like "where were you on October the 31st at 7:00 o'clock in the evening." They couldn't remember, and his questions were designed to discredit them and their union.

At the end of the hearing, Hank Hasiwar and I were standing about this far apart. This Congressman came over, grabs each of us by the arm and said, "Fellows, let me tell you. If these big growers get you in a hassel and they start accusing you of being Communists, come to me and I'll straighten them out." Hank was already mad and he was just ready to hit the Congressman and I grabbed Hank and said, "Come on, Hank, let's go." And "thank you Mr. Nixon." and we walked out.

I am sure our first "Robot President" who is so insensitive to human needs, never realized how close he was to being hit by a union organizer.

CESAR CHAVEZ JOINS THE UNION

After the DiGiorgio strike, there was another strike of cotton pickers out in California. I didn't know it but one of the strikers was Cesar Chavez. When I visited the headquarters of Cesar Chavez' union at Keene, California, Cesar told me that his first union membership was in the National Farm Labor Union. He said he was in a caravan. They went around from farm to farm and called people out. Instead of walking, they drove the old cars called jalopies from ranch to ranch and called other workers out of the fields.

PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON MIGRATORY LABOR

We also got another President's Commission on migratory labor in agriculture appointed by President Harry S. Truman. This Commission made a monumental report but little was being done about it. One of your U. S. Senators Pete Williams headed a Senate Committee and they made a start in bringing farm labor under Social Welfare laws. But the real job remained to be done.

From 1950 on through until 1958, we constantly were after the labor movement to undertake the job of organizing agricultural workers. Then about 1958 when we got a group of people together, including Mrs. Roosevelt, Frank Graham, Norman Thomas, A. Phillip Randolph and other prominent liberal Americans, and held a hearing in Washington. They invited the administration to send representatives and tell what they planned to do about farm workers. They also invited the AFL-CIO to send representatives to tell what they were going to do about it. The AFL-CIO did send their Secretary Treasurer, who made a pledge that the AFL-CIO would provide the manpower and money to finance on organizing campaign among agricultural workers. The organizing campaign was launched early in 1959 in California in an area that we had selected and where we had some several thousand members. Our members became the basis for the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee - AFL-CIO.

In 1964 when the grape pickers, who were Filipinos, struck the Schenley Ranch at Delano, California, and Cesar Chavez, who had been in the Mexican-American Community Service Organization lived in Delano. His group wouldn't do anything about helping farm workers, so Chavez started out his own and had persuaded the Federal Government to make a grant under OEO's program to set up co-ops and credit unions and things like that for farm workers. He found that all his supporters were involved in this strike along with the Filipinos and he became the leader of what is now called the United Farm Workers.

THE STFU ALIVE TODAY

Contrary to what some historians have said or written, there was no demise of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. The movement we started in the South nearly 40 years ago is very much alive, in the west where they are currently engaged in a campaign to organize lettuce pickers and it has succeeded in getting a contract in Florida with the Coca Cola Company, the owner of the Minute Maid Citrus fruit plants, and thousands of acres of orange groves.

MICROFILMS

I should like to mention two things. One is that the papers of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union called the "Archives of the Rural Poor" (1934-70) are on microfilm. There are 60 reels, with upwards of 100,000 pieces. There are thousands of letters from sharecroppers and farm workers, black and white, about their day to day problems. I was a kind of pack rat and saved all papers that came our way. I hope that soon your University will acquire the STFU Papers. Incidentially there are also hundreds of letters from students attracted by this movement who wrote to us asking for information needed to write papers. Enquiries still come.

I could talk all the rest of the evening, but you may have some questions to ask me.

Q Will you describe the kind of help Norman Thomas gave you in the early days.

A Norman Thomas came to Arkansas in early 1934 before the Union was started and spoke at a meeting. He was responsible for the first public attention being given to the plight of sharecroppers. He raised money to make a survey of the conditions of sharecroppers under the New Deal. He wrote a pamplet based on this survey called "The Plight of the Sharecroppers." He spoke about the Union very often on radio networks and in public meetings. He came back to Arkansas repeatedly. He was a speaker at many Union meetings. He was often called the Godfather of the STFU.

I failed to tell about the two Princetonians at the sharecropper's meeting in Birdsong. Norman Thomas had been invited to speak at the little church in Birdsong. The building was too small to hold the crowd gathered to hear Thomas. So, the church people decided to have Mr. Thomas speak on the steps at the front door. There were a number of plantation owners, riding bosses and deputy sheriffs on the outer edge of the crowd. Howard Kester started to introduce Thomas. He said, "Ladies and Gentlemen" and a rough voice yelled, "They ain't no ladies here and they ain't no gentlemen on the platform." Thomas protested that he had a right to speak, a right guaranteed by the U. S. Constitution and by the Constitution of Arkansas. Others among the plantation owners told him to get out of Arkansas. One said, "We ain't gonna have no bald headed Yankee S. O. B. coming down here telling us how to treat our labor. They also said that this was the best county in the best state in the God damned United States. They pulled Thomas off the platform, put him in the car and escorted the car he was riding in to the Mississippi River bridge going into Memphis. I never knew Normas Thomas to use any kind of language other than that of a proper Princetonian, but he could become most indignant about the treatment he received at Birdsong and would sometimes quote what was said by the planter mobsters about his being a "Bald headed Yankee S. O. B."

Q What did the Socialist Party do to help the Union? Did the Party contribute funds?

A The Socialist Party didn't have any money either, maybe more than the Union, but they did have contacts, among the well to do people who could contribute. Socialist Party members gave their help in raising money, contacting press and radio. Without the help of Socialists from Norman Thomas on down, we probably could never have survived.

Q I understand that the Department of Agriculture was opposed to the Union.

A Yes, very much so. We were opposed to their way of operating the farm programs. We dug up the dirt on their operations and exposed them. We also talked about redistributing the big plantations to those who had no land. We were considered revolutionists too, when we got into the race problem and succeeded in uniting black and white people in an organization of their own. The county agents were told to break up the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. There is a document in the microfilms of the STFU Papers that was found in the archives in Washington by a historian. He gave us a copy 30 years afterwards. It wasn't classified as Top Secret, it was just hidden.

Q When Henry Wallace sent the woman lawyer to Arkansas, was she sent to cover things up instead of investigating.

A No. I think Wallace was sincere. I think he wanted to find the facts and when she made the investigation and submitted the report, substantiating nearly everything we charged, the cotton planters and politicans brought pressure on him and he let the

Mary Connor Myers Report be supressed. The Myers Report is not even in the National Archives. Chester C. Davis who said it was "to hot to print" must have appropriated it or had it destroyed A liberal member of Congress read it in the AAA office. Mrs. Myers talked about her investigation, too. Newspapers covered the story.

Q You were quite critical of the New Deal. What did you think of Roosevelt?

A In the beginning we were most critical of the Roosevelt Administration, but we soon found that we had friends in the New Deal Agencies. Aubrey Williams of the National Youth Administration even hired me for a short time. Then there was Dr. Will Alexander who headed the Farm Security Administration. There were a few others even in the Department of Agriculture. Not all of them were fired as was Gardner Jackson.

Q Do you think that the photography of FSA helped the sharecroppers?

A Yes, I did think it helped show the rest of the country what life was really like in those days. People like Margaret Bourke White, Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans and others made a great contribution.

Q What about the Socialist Party in Arkansas. How close was its connection with the Union?

A The Socialist Party was organized two years before the STFU. I venture to say we had more members by 1934 than the entire Socialist Party in the United States has today.

We must have had 1,000 members in Arkansas and nearly all were in the Tyronza Local. I even became State Secretary (all unpaid jobs too). Most of the members were sharecroppers. There were some Negroes who were Socialists too. We offered a solution to some of their problems and they all joined.

Norman Thomas told us on his first visit we needed a sharecropper organization, not a political party. That shows what kind of politician Norman Thomas was. He wasn't interested in votes, office or political power, but was interested in the welfare of people.

I think I kept my Socialist Party membership until 1936. Anyway, the Tyronza Local just faded away. Most of the people became members of the Union. I may have supported Roosevelt by 1940. I didn't vote for him. We were in Memphis where we had an agreement with Boss Crump. We didn't take any part in politics and he didn't organize sharecroppers. When we moved to Washington no one who lived there could vote. So it was 1964 when I was in Louisiana that I cast my vote. By that time Norman Thomas was no longer running for President. I voted against Nixon in 1968 - 1972. But, for all the years from 1934 until Thomas died we were good friends. When I went to New York City I always called him. Usually we had lunch together.

Q Was there a way out or a solution to the sharecropper problem, or anything done before the New Deal?

A Not that I know of, very few people had ever heard of a sharecropper until we started our organization down in Arkansas. In the 1930's with Norman Thomas's help we made sharecropper a household word. Of course, there would not have been a sharecropper problem had the promises made to newly freed slaves in 1865 of "40 acres and a mule" been kept. By 1935 there were 8 million white folks and 3 million black folks who were sharecroppers of one sort or another down South.

The Union's solution was to resettle people on the land with co-operative farming as one way, the other was to bring small industry to the rural South and create a kind of village life.

Q What was the proportion of white members to black members in the Union.

A In the beginning 60% of the Union members were white and 40% Negro. It became more black than white after World War II started and the whites got jobs in war industry. Even before the war started the migration to defense plants began. Negroes did not begin to get jobs until near the end of World War II.

Q When your membership became more black than white did the leadership change too in the same proportion?

A That is a good question. First of all, we started as an interracial organization, the local unions were usually integrated, probably because the black folks had meeting places, like their churches, the white sharecroppers had few community facilities that could be used for union meetings. Sometimes we had separate locals but as happened in Marked Tree, Arkansas, they both used the same hall and attended each other's meeting. The only way one could tell whether the local was white or black was by which set of officers were on the platform. The convention met every year. They elected the officers and an Executive Board. I operated as a kind of sharecropper's hired hand.

At the annual convention we had a nominating committee to select a representative from each area where the Union existed. After the membership became maybe 75% black, the committee came in with its report and they recommended a lot more whites than blacks for election to the Executive Board. I called attention to this and was put in my place by the committee chairman, a white headed older man, a Negro who said, "The Secretary is out of order, we selected the men we thought best fitted for the jobs. We did not consider whether the men were white or colored and if H. L. Mitchell doesn't like the ones we propose, he can make his nominations at the proper time to the convention." He added, "We don't bother with his work and he has no business bothering with ours." That ended the question.

I could stay here all night and talk, but I expect you historians are running out of questions.

SELECTED READINGS ON FARM TENANCY

4

TENANCY OVER THE NATION

FARMERS of the United States are steadily losing ownership of their land. Year after year the percentage of all farms under rental continues to grow. In 1880 about one-fourth of all our farms were "kept" by tenants. In 1900 the figure was 35 per cent; in 1910, 37 per cent; in 1920, 38 per cent; in 1930, about 42 per cent; in 1940, approximately 47 per cent. Except in New England and a few of the South Atlantic states, tenancy increases throughout our nation, and no political regime or credit system has yet thwarted its determined growth.

In 1935 the proportion of farm land under lease or rental to the operator ranged from 62 per cent in South Dakota to 8 per cent in Maine and Massachusetts. Equities of the farm operators in all farm real estate of the entire nation ranged from an average of less than 30 per cent in Illinois, Iowa, and South Dakota to an average of over 70 per cent in Maine, New Hampshire, and West Virginia. The census of 1940 clearly evidences a continuation of this trend.

Cotton remains our greatest tenant's or sharecropper's crop. Today about 75 per cent of all cotton farms, as classified by census, are tenant-run. More than a fourth of all farms of the United States are cotton farms. Outside of cotton farms, slightly more than a third of all our farms are tenant-run.

The average gross value of all cotton farms is about $2,950 each; while all other farms in all parts of the country represent an average value of about $9,250 each. Thus quite obviously cotton tenancy is not occasioned by high values of farm properties. Cotton happens to be a harvest best suited to tenant operation and cottongrowing remains an outlet for services of rural millions whom other lands and trades do not require and will not accept.

Very small farms (less than 50 acres) are the most numerous tenant lands of the South. In most other parts of the country tenancy ratios are higher among larger farms of higher value.

Quoting Dr. H. A. Turner, of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics:[1]

"The rate of tenancy among white farmers of the South (46 percent) in 1935 is much less than among colored farmers (77 percent). Among white farmers of the nation, excluding the South, the rate of tenancy was 30 percent. The rate of tenancy among colored farmers of the South has increased only a little since 1900, when it was already 75 percent. But the tenancy rate among the white farmers of the South has increased considerably—from 36 percent in 1900 to 46 percent in 1935. The rate of tenancy among farmers elsewhere than in the South changed less rapidly. It averaged 25 percent in 1900 and 30 percent in 1935.

"Among Negro tenant farmers of the South it is worth noting that 59 percent operated as 'croppers' in 1935, that is, they depended on their landlords not only for land, but also for the work-stock with which to farm that land, and usually even for food and feed while making the crop. The proportion of southern colored tenants who were croppers was only 47 percent in 1920, then increased to 54 percent in 1925, 56 percent in 1930, and 59 percent in 1935. By contrast, only 29 percent of the white tenants of the South farmed as croppers in 1935, which is the same percentage as in 1925, and only a little higher than in 1920.

"As might be expected, the percentage of tenancy among young farmers is much higher than that among older farmers. But it is interesting that the number of young farmers has decreased, and the number of middle-aged and old farmers has increased; that tenancy has increased among farmers of every age group, and that the increase is particularly rapid among farmers of the younger ages. Thus, of the number of farmers 25 to 35 years of age farming outside the sixteen southern states there were approximately 652,000 in 1910, but only [illegible] in 1930, with a rate of tenancy among these farmers of [illegible] percent in 1910 and [illegible] percent in 1930. . . .

". . . The incidence of tenancy is increasing rather than decreasing with the passing of time. There were only 180 counties in 1880 wherein as many as half of the farms were tenant-operated, and practically all these were in the South; but in 1935 such counties totaled 1107 (of 3060 counties and parishes in the United States), and they effectively blanketed the Cotton Belt and much of the more fertile parts of the Corn Belt as well. The number of counties wherein half or more of all farm land was under lease to the operator was 403 in 1916, 772 in 1925, 1020 in 1930 and 1107 in 1935. . . ."

All told, tenancy is a rather strange commodity.

So, for that matter, is news. Recently while strolling through England, Arkansas, I was meditating on these truths. In February, 1931, the name of this town was in headlines throughout America and throughout the world. For England, Arkansas, had become the scene of the first recorded rural food riot in the history of the United States.

On a dreary winter afternoon, a band of farmers, most of them tenants or sharecroppers, had banded together, raided a store and completely looted its shelves. These were hungry men. Their crops had failed. The whole area was victim of a disastrous cycle of bank failures. And landlords were unable, or unwilling, to advance money or food to tenants and sharecroppers.

I did not see the riot, but as a newspaper reporter I was among the first to cover its aftermath. A local sheriff had telephoned the state capital for help. News noses sniffed. Three of us, then in Little Rock, piled into an automobile, splashed and skidded thirty miles to the scene of the riot.

The looting was ended. The storekeeper roamed dazedly through his ruined store. He had been pillaged "down to bedrock" by neighbors and friends; he had been raided and robbed by home people, many of whom he had long called by their first names; to whom he had frequently sold goods—for honorable payment.

The sheriff and his two rural deputies were likewise somewhat dazed. They had recognized many of the rioters "as honorable, peace-abiding citizens. But the raiders had been hungry and desperate. They declined to listen to pleadings or argument. The sheriff now waited at the doorway, puffing a cigarette, hat pulled low over his eyes. When I asked him his opinion of the real cause of the riot he said, "Sharecroppin, goddammit." And he added, "These men ain't criminals. They're sharecroppers. They planted jest what their landlords told 'em to plant—cotton. The crop got burnt up by drought. The landlords is mainly broke. Now the landlords can't borry money and the tenants has got no cows or chickens or gardens to depend on. They can't eat cotton. They can't sell it. I don't blame any man for fightin' when he hungers. All I blame is this whole bloody set up of tenancy."

England, Arkansas, is a typical crossroads town of the sharecropping South. It is a clearing center for tenancy failures and hopes for tenancy successes.

Still a dominant news phase of American farming, tenancy is also a "root tradition." In colonial days, farming was preponderantly an agriculture of tenancy. At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, and indeed through 1800, at least 60 per cent of all our farms were tenant-run. The opening of public domain and homestead pioneering drastically lowered that percentage. But since 1880 the proportion of tenant to landowning farmers has been growing.

This increase is definitely a world-wide trend. In the British Isles, whose agriculture has set patterns of farm practice for so much of the modern world, at least 90 per cent of all farmers are rent farmers.

About 55 per cent of the farmers of Belgium are tenants. In Japan the percentage is about 30; in Germany, about 25; in France, 25; in Ireland, about 40; Canada and Denmark, with nearly 85 per cent of their farmers landowners, probably lead the world in farm proprietorship. But by way of remembering that tenancy characterizes new countries as well as old, we might notice that in Australia 78 per cent of all farms are tenant-run; 59 per cent in New Zealand, and about 40 per cent in frontierish Argentina.[*]

In the United States, the most rapid increase in tenancy now takes place in the richest lands of the Midwest. In "banner" farm states, such as Iowa and Minnesota, more than a third of the farms are now tenant-run. In Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana the tenant increase is even more spectacular. Definitely on the upgrade throughout most of the country, tenancy is a majority agriculture only in the South, and thus the spotlight of tenant news continues to play southward.

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[*] These statistics were approximately correct as of January 1, 1939. The effect of the current war upon tenancy status of Europe is still unknown.

During the past decade, the southern sharecropper has become a folk-drama item in real and would-be American literature. Newspapers, magazines, motion pictures, books, radio, and the stage have foaled a vast cyclopedia of sharecropper literature—sad chronicles of po' white trash as he anguishes and languishes among the juniper forests and you-all birds, way down So-outh.

Frequently these expressions are grasping the sleeve of truth. Though the sleeve becomes warped and threadbare with continuous tuggings, it nevertheless belongs to a garment of fact. As a Southerner I am abundantly aware that sharecropping, considered broadly, is a deplorable institution. Roam through the South and you are certain to see a great deal of tenant tragedy: forlorn shacks, hopeless hovels, fields gully-torn and ravished of topsoil. It is mere honesty to admit as much with the greatest possible candor. And the truth stands that in the cotton-growing South you can see also good tenants and good tenant farms.

For example in southern Alabama I became acquainted with a farmer named James N. Sanderlin, an expert cotton breeder, a soil researcher, and a veteran tenant who now owns and operates a 4,000-acre plantation which lies in rolling foothill country. Most of the land he bought at "fire-sale" prices, because it had been "cropped to death." Sanderlin proceeded to prove himself a doctor of sick soils. He began to restore poor land to life by slow and oftentimes expensive processes of legume planting, green manures, terracing and drainage, application of lime and animal manures. Only when soil becomes reasonably fertile does he rent the land, and once rented he insists that the tenant take proper care of it. He explains:

"Good soil draws good tenants. Poor soil draws poor tenants. Success of any rent farm depends on the caliber of its tenants and the caliber of tenants depends largely on the fertility of the land."

Mr. Sanderlin is of English parentage. Though American born, he spent about ten years of his boyhood on an English farm. He has, therefore, learned at first hand some of the great creeds of British agriculture, and some of them he has applied.

Though tiny in size, England is a great farming nation. For each citizen she has only about two-thirds of an acre of farm land; whereas here in the United States we actually cultivate about two and two-thirds acres for every citizen. About three-fourths of the land of England is in grass. Yet these sparse acres provide the enormous English public with most of its milk, about half of its meat supply, more than four-fifths of its vegetables, half of its fruits, and about a third of its grains. Such accomplishments prove a great agriculture.

In England when a tenant leaves a farm he is credited with all improvements he has made, including improvement to soil. He is entitled to compensation by the owner for all fertilizers applied, and for terracing, drainage, and other substantial improvements to land. When a tenant leaves a given farm or plot he can thus collect for his own investment in improving another man's land. He has sound and logical motive for making improvements.

Sanderlin likes this practice. On his own plantation he cannot make literal use of England's accredited tables of values for soil improvement. But he can and does make use of the principle.

At present he rents about two-fifths of his plantation for cash. The rest of the rented land is sharecropped on standard terms: two-thirds of field crops and livestock for tenant, one-third for landlord; the tenant supplying work stock, implements, and seed—otherwise a half-and-half division.

For manures applied by tenants he makes a cash refund of from 25 to 50 cents a ton. For commercial fertilizers applied, he repays half the total cost, for he knows that increased yields build up the value of his land and increase its rentals. When green manures, like vetch or rye, are advisable he refunds rentals for the year or gives free use of the same acreage for field crops. For applying lime he bears half or more than half the expense. He provides free use of land to reward tenant efforts in draining or terracing. His terms of lease demand crop rotation. This automatically prohibits a monopoly of cotton.

Sanderlin's plantation is a pertinent instance of the truth that yesterday's news of tenant failure sometimes weaves itself into today's news of tenancy successes. Thus notable trails lead forward in American land relations; trails of sound rental as well as sound ownership of farms; trails which may be reliably followed and bettered as needs and place require.

Being in an amiable mood, and possessed of a disposition almost invariably sweet during at least two days of the week, and being affectionate by nature, I shall temporarily forgo listing instances of tenant abuses, though I sincerely believe that for every instance of constructive and decent tenancy relationship in the South anyone will shortly discover a hundred which are socially deplorable or drably corrupt, or both.

Although tenancy of land is almost as old as man's agriculture, much of its history is bleak and villainous; a saga of waste, deception, and cruel dishonesty. Furthermore, United States standards of land tenure are among the most rapacious and degenerate of the modern world; an overlapping disgrace to American government, courts, banking, to investment finance and miscellaneous ethics of ownership.

Yet land tenure is upbound, a seemingly inevitable trend of modern agrarian destinies. It has an unchallengeable place in the continuing history of yeomanry. Rental of land remains a proving ground and a steppingstone for ownership of land. During a prolonged era when demands for the harvests of our fields are tremendously varied, with rapid rises and collapses, tenancy facilitates upward and downward adjustments of acreage. It enables millions of our people to return to land, and in a measure to live from land.

Today, homestead land is rarely worth homesteading; livable farms are a coveted property. A poor man can no longer take good land to be his own by the might of his ax or his private enterprise as claimant. Farms are a basic property, with proprietary rights so ungiving and dogmatic that a self-perpetuating orgy of farmland speculation and mortgage juggling seems permanently with us.

Farm property rights of feudal rapacity have survived in conspicuous disregard of self-evident needs of a highly industrialized era. Today the factory owner is hedged by hundreds of limitations of proprietor's rights. Laws require that he limit working hours of employees, reduce and control hazards to life and limb of employees, pay stipulated minimum wages, maintain standards of sanitation and emergency aid, abide by industrial child-labor laws, and otherwise curb and modify the rapacious philosophy upon which most American industry was admittedly founded.

In today's agriculture, law accords the employee or renter an absolute minimum of protection. Courts and government alike are usually deaf to his pleas. The majority of farms of the United States are of a size and type to be operated principally by one man (theoretically the proprietor) and his family. Though farm tenancy is a world trend, and though its increase is apparently as inevitable as tomorrow's sunrise, American government, both federal and state, consistently disregards this reality, with the result that the rent farmer, probably the largest labor group in the United States, is the least noticed and the least attended by law of all working classes.

The reasons are highly political and profoundly antisocial. With sleazy expediency our politicians continue to label the rent farmer a rural proprietor. The New Deal for Agriculture, through its successive AAA's, has carried forward this folklore, strewing billions of dollars of public funds for alleged farm relief, tranquilly avoiding the continued growth in tenancy totals, and the ever-lowering living standards of farm tenants generally.

From birth this New Deal for Agriculture has been basically capitalistic. Its regime has instituted a memorable high of big-farm profits. It has paid an appalling proportion of federal "benefits" to owners of land rather than to workers of land. It has dropped a few unavoidable crumbs to tenants, but the cream of the swag has gone, and is going, to big owners of big farms—200 to 2,000 acres. Study acreage limitation benefits paid to growers of cotton, sugar, wheat, and cattle, and you will immediately discover that an exorbitant percentage of all Treasury donations are being collected by a relatively tiny coterie of super farmowners, some of whom lift sums ranging from $10,000 to $1,000,000 yearly from the vast feeding trough of the federal government.

It is inclined to be a saga of crumbs for tenants and pound cakes for owners. Soil conservation "programs" of the AAA have further subsidized and glorified ownership of land. Their general force is to make rich farms richer, poor farms poorer, and in terms of protective legislation to leave tenants waiting in the cold.

It is true, and praiseworthy, that part of the seventeen farm credit agencies included in the New Deal for Agriculture have sought to make certain types of credit accessible to rent farmers who seek to buy the land they till. But stated broadly, in this country as in many others any continued agrarian economy of scarcity serves to accentuate extremes of rural wealth and rural poverty, while subsidy on a basis of mere ownership leads backwards to a cruel and predatory jungle of damn-*you*-it-belongs-to-*me!*

There is pitifully little progress as regards just recognition of the rights and place of the farm tenant. The admirable, if still feeble, Tenant Farmers Union excepted, no widespread effort has been made to assure the tenant of his self-evident rights as an American citizen and a valid producer. Time and time again state governments have evaded such a responsibility. Coteries of two-bit politicians and swivel-chair lobbyists who serve as collection platters for so-called national farm organizations likewise continue to evade the issue of land tenure. The Roosevelt administration, like its ambiguous farm-tinkering predecessor, the Hoover administration, has largely fluked and dodged this agrarian essential.

For tenant consideration is a majority need, and it is a feat easily possible. Today our own rent farmers, as I have pointed out earlier, are perhaps the least protected of any great working group in the Western World. As a matter of United States Supreme Court record, a tenant has virtually no legal grounds for recovery of improvement of another man's properties, even if those improvements are essential to his own livelihood and gainful employment, even though they add materially and provably to the land's value.

It is probable that a tremendous majority of sharecroppers are not even protected by credible lease. Indeed, farm leases are so little used that the Department of Agriculture (a nonpolitical division) recently elected to publish a first bulletin on how to write and sign a lawful lease of farm property. Even with the scanty protection of a lease, in most states a farm tenant can still be evicted at any whim of the landlord's, without protection of work investment; and in some states without compensation of crops planted and abandoned at landlord's demand. The tenant has little choice of crops or tillage methods. It is notorious in southern farm history that cotton sharecroppers are frequently not allowed so much as a square yard of soil for growing a garden. Their chance to keep a cow, or a few hens, or any other belongings to improve rations and livability is usually dependent on the frequently missing discretion or benevolence of the landowner.

The chances of the average southern Negro sharecroppers to present a tenure grievance in a local court are as the survival chances of an ice cube in hell. In blind disregard of self-evident principles of land zoning landowners of all sections are allowed to rent, parcel, and otherwise foist the most sterile land for the use of tenants.

But today's story of land tenure in the United States is not an inevitable story. Its wrongs are not incurable. State legislation could readily provide a code of competent law for better protection of both tenant and landowner. With plans already completed and at an expense not exceeding 1 per cent of the present upkeep appropriation of the Department of Agriculture, the federal government, within a maximum of ten years, could most probably acquire and provide to local courts authentic and reliable soil surveys of every acre of tilled land in every county of the United States.

Such surveys can and do indicate with commendable accuracy the productive possibilities of soils and could comprise an unimpeachable basis for appraising soil improvements. It would be generally possible for career scientific and research divisions of the Department of Agriculture to produce tables of value for every type of tenant improvement in every farming section of the United States, and to present such tabulations to all farm agents and to every civil court in the country. This has already been done in other countries—as an accepted obligation of government and public census. Indeed, the present field personnel of the Department of Agriculture is now big enough to provide almost all farming counties not only with competent soil surveys, but with accurate and objective appraisals of all improvements made on farms by both tenants and proprietors.

Such skilled appraisers could then co-operate with local courts in enforcement of justice as regards land tenure. This might not be convenient politics, but neither are cruel poverty and vanishing soils. Neither is the picture of incessant multitudes of poor farmers changing land with every season, blackening and blasting their own lives as they proceed to waste and squander the nation's soil.

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COTTON TENANCY

COTTON has been the most important American commercial crop. It is linked historically with many of our characteristic institutions: the plantation system, the rise and collapse of slavery, and, to an amazing degree, with the culture of the entire South. For more than a century, this greatest of economic assets has been also our greatest social humiliation. The Kingdom of Cotton, reared first upon the backs of black slaves, is supported today by an ever-increasing horde of white and black tenants and share-croppers whose lives are hopelessly broken by the system. Although adding a billion dollars annually to the wealth of the world, the cotton farmers themselves are the most impoverished and backward of any large group of producers in America.

The cotton tenants live at the level of mere subsistence. But they are not the only sufferers under the evil despotism of King Cotton. The devotion to a single crop has left the whole region of the Old South dependent upon the fluctuations of one commodity, at the mercy of the success of a single plant. Continuous tilling of one crop has worn out soil over wide areas which previously were rich and fertile. Devotion to a commercial harvest has left an abundant farm region destitute of food crops, and its people living on a shockingly meager and ill-balanced diet.

The past five years of economic depression have accentuated the problems and aggravated the evils of American cotton culture. Changes in world markets and the development of substitute materials now threaten the life of the industry. The growth of cotton in the Southwest, and the prospect of increasing use of machinery in tilling and picking, make it certain that the ancient order of cotton culture in the Old South is doomed. Sweeping changes in southern farming must come swiftly if millions of former plantation workers are not to be completely wrecked—if the region itself is not to suffer violent ruin.

THE COTTON BELT

The cotton belt as determined by soil, climate, and rainfall, lies between 25° and 37° north latitude. Cotton culture now occupies a belt 300 miles north and south, stretching 1,600 miles from the Carolinas to western Texas. In this area 125 million acres are devoted to this single crop—nearly as great an amount of land as is given to all other crops together in this huge region.

Until the Civil War cotton was produced chiefly under the plantation system with slave labor. Free or white workers had no place on the old plantations. The presence or absence of cotton culture largely determined the racial distribution of the population in American settlement during the period from the middle of the 18th to the middle of the 19th century. Negro slavery and cotton grew up together in the Old South, beginning in the Carolinas, which were most typical of cotton culture and the plantation order a century or more ago. But this one crop system, essentially exploitative of the soil, always found it easier to move westward to newer land than to preserve or restore the old farms. Thus the cotton area, carrying slavery and the plantation with it, moved steadily to Georgia and Alabama, then on to Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana. More recently, with the former slaves simply transformed into almost equally dependent tenants, and with ever increasing numbers of white laborers drawn into the meshes of tenancy, the cotton area has moved on westward to Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and finally to southern California. Expansion westward proceeded very gradually until after 1910, when, at the time of the World War, came a tremendous expansion of the Southwest.

The belt is marked by dense farm populations. While the South, as a whole, is the most thickly populated rural area in America, the cotton belt is the most densely peopled region in the South. Negroes, remaining from slavery times, contribute large numbers to the older sections, forming over forty per cent of the total inhabitants of South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama, and slightly more than half the population of Mississippi. But Negroes no longer make up the bulk of cotton tenants. White workers, in an increasing flood, have been drawn into the cotton fields, until today they outnumber the blacks more than five to three.

TENANCY

In the ten chief cotton states over sixty per cent of those engaged in the production of this crop are tenants. The computations of Rupert B. Vance place the number of tenant families in the cotton belt at 1,790,783. Of these, 1,091,944 are white, and 698,839 are colored. The family units of white tenants are larger than the colored, due in part to the earlier break-up of Negro families and the high infant death rate. The total number of individuals in these tenant families runs to approximately five and a half million whites and slightly over three million Negroes.

Tenancy for decades has been steadily increasing. The number of farms operated by tenants in the South was high enough in 1880, when 36.2 per cent were run by tenants. By 1920 the percentage of tenancy had reached 49.6, and in 1930 it was 55.5. These figures are for the South as a whole. In the cotton belt the percentage of tenancy is still higher. Out of every hundred cotton farms, over sixty are operated by tenants.

Up to the Civil War cotton laborers universally were Negro slaves. It is one of the strange facts of the history of the slave period that white non-slaveholding families, in spite of their numbers and their destitution, were given no place in the expanding cotton culture, save where they were able to hang on to the fringes of the industry as overseers or as small independent farmers. After Emancipation, however, white families began to compete with Negroes for the new kind of slavery involved in tenancy. The white tenants have increased steadily, filling the new openings in the expanding industry, and taking places left vacant by Negroes who migrated from the plantations to northern and southern cities. In the decade from 1920 to 1930, white tenants in the cotton states increased by 200,000 families—approximately a million persons. During the same decade Negro tenants decreased by 2,000 families as a result of mass movements to cities. Since 1914, this Negro migration to the North alone has exceeded a million and a half persons. Increasingly, therefore, the problems of the rural South in general, and of cotton tenancy in particular, are those of native white families much more than of Negroes.

What Is a Tenant?

A farm tenant, in the widest meaning of the term, is any person who hires the farm which he operates, paying for the use of the land either by a share of the crop which he raises or by cash rental or both. Now the renting of land is not in itself a bad thing; it is customary in other parts of America and to a limited extent in Europe. It is a simple means of getting access to land by persons who have not capital enough to purchase farms. Normally it is regarded as a step on the road to independent ownership. The evil is not in renting land but in the traditions and practices which have grown up about it in the South.

Tenants may be divided into three main classes: (a) renters who hire land for a fixed rental to be paid either in cash or its equivalent in crop values; (b) share tenants, who furnish their own farm equipment and work animals and obtain use of land by agreeing to pay a fixed per cent of the cash crop which they raise; (c) share-croppers who have to have furnished to them not only the land but also farm tools and animals, fertilizer, and often even the food they consume, and who in return pay a larger per cent of the crop.

In considering cotton tenancy, the first group may be almost ignored. Those who have definite agreements with landlords as to exact rental prices are few in number and their status is so independent as to remove them from the system of subservient tenancy. The share tenants and share-croppers are the two great subdivisions of the dependent workers in the cotton belt. The difference between these two classes is simply one of degree. The share tenants, since they supply much of their own equipment, are able to rent the land on fairly good terms, usually on the basis of paying to the owner not more than one-fourth or one-third of the crop raised. The share-croppers, on the other hand, having almost nothing to offer but their labor, must pay as rent a higher share of the product, usually one-half of the crop. In addition, of course, both tenants and croppers must pay out of their share of the crop for all that is supplied to them in the way of seed, fertilizer, and food supplies. "Tenancy," as used in the present report and as commonly applied in the South, is a general term covering both the share tenants and the share-croppers, but not the renters. As a matter of fact, over one-third of all tenants in the South, and over half of the Negro tenants are croppers, that is, in the lowest category of poverty and dependence.

The risk of the tenant increases, of course, in proportion to what he is able to contribute to the contract. There is almost no financial risk assumed by the share cropper who furnishes only his labor (and that of his family), who receives his equipment and supplies and even his food, from the owner. The share tenant, who supplies his own tools and work animals, assumes more risk, and in return expects a larger share of the earnings. The renter of course assumes much greater risk. In turn the landlord's potential profits increase as he assumes more and more of the risk. Therein lies a danger to the tenant. It is to the advantage of the owner to encourage the most dependent form of share cropping as a source of largest profits. And he wishes to hold in greatest dependence just those workers who are most efficient. A shiftless and inefficient cropper is of little value to the owner and is expelled, unless, in a serious labor shortage, absence of any worker is even more costly than the presence of an incompetent one. The industrious and thrifty tenant is sought by the landlord. The very qualities which might normally lead a tenant to attain the position of renter, and eventually of owner, are just the ones which make him a permanent asset as a cropper. Landlords, thus, are most concerned with maintaining the system that furnishes them labor and that keeps this labor under their control, that is, in the tenancy class. The means by which landowners do this are: first, the credit system; and second, the established social customs of the plantation order.

As a part of the age-old custom in the South, the landlord keeps the books and handles the sale of all the crops. The owner returns to the cropper only what is left over of his share of the profits after deductions for all items which the landlord has advanced to him during the year: seed, fertilizer, working equipment, and food supplies, plus interest on all this indebtedness, plus a theoretical "cost of supervision." The landlord often supplies the food—"pantry supplies" or "furnish"—and other current necessities through his own store or commissary. Fancy prices at the commissary, exorbitant interest, and careless or manipulated accounts, make it easy for the owner to keep his tenants constantly in debt.

The plight of the tenant at annual settlement time is so common that a whole folklore about it has grown up in the South.

> A tenant offering five bales of cotton was told, after some owl-eyed figuring, that this cotton exactly balanced his debt. Delighted at the prospect of a profit this year, the tenant reported that he had one more bale which he hadn't yet brought in. "Shucks," shouted the boss, "why didn't you tell me before? Now I'll have to figure the account all over again to make it come out even."

Of course every story of this kind, and such stories are innumerable, can be matched by tales of unreliability and shiftlessness on the part of the tenant. The case against the system cannot be rested on any personal indictment of landlords any more than it can be vindicated by stories of the improvidence of tenants. The fact is that landlords generally act as they find it necessary to act under the system; tenants do likewise. The development of bad economic and social habits of whatever kind on the part of both landlords and tenants is direct evidence of a faulty system.

Even more than the credit system, the traditions of the region hold the tenant in thrall. The plantation system developed during slavery. It continues on the old master and slave pattern. For many years, even after

Emancipation, black tenants were the rule in the cotton fields and the determination to "keep the Negro in his place" was, if anything, stronger after the Civil War than before. Although white families now form the great majority of the cotton tenants, the old "boss and black" attitude still pervades the whole system. Because of his economic condition, and because of his race, color, and previous condition of servitude, the rural Negro is helpless before the white master. Every kind of exploitation and abuse is permitted because of the old caste prejudice. The poor white connives in this abuse of the Negro; in fact, he is the most violent protagonist of it. This fixed custom of exploitation of the Negro has carried over to the white tenant and cropper. Yet it has been impossible to bring about any change, even to get the poor white workers to take a stand, since any movement for reform is immediately confused with the race issue. Because of their insistence upon the degrading of three million Negro tenants, five and a half million white workers continue to keep themselves in virtual peonage.

What the Tenant Earns

The average American farm family in 1929 earned $1,240, and this was about a third of the average for non-farm families. The lowest general earnings were in the southern states. The Carolinas, Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee, the states of the old cotton belt, stood at the bottom of the list. Here, even at the period of national prosperity, a vast farm population barely earned subsistence.

Every study of wages and income in the South makes perfectly clear the low economic position of the rural South. Clarence Heer's exhaustive study of wages and income, covering a period of thirty years, showed that southern agriculture had provided its farmers just about half the per capita income of farmers in other sections. This includes all the "independent farmers, plantation owners, tenants, and share croppers." When tenants alone are considered, the family earnings slump distressingly below the level of decent subsistence.

The debts are a part of the system and are of two kinds: those accumulating from year to year; and current debts arising from the "furnishing" system. More than a third of the tenants have debts of more than a year's standing. In six widely differing counties included in the field studies of our Committee, 43.4 per cent of the tenants were in debt before they planted their 1934 crop. The average indebtedness, according to the Alabama tenants who were able to keep any record of their accounts, was $80.00.

As to current earnings or deficits, a study of Negro tenant farmers in Macon County, Alabama, in 1932, published in *Shadow of the Plantation*, showed that 61.7 per cent "broke even," 26.0 per cent "went in the hole," and 9.4 per cent made some profit. Of this latter group the total income ranged from about $70 to $90 per year. The special inquiry into tenant farmer earnings by this Committee, which covered some 2,000 families in 1934 and 1935 in Mississippi, Texas, Alabama, and South Carolina, found variations in earnings according to soil fertility and types of management, but universally a sub-standard. Inseparable from the small gross earnings of these farmers was the stern factor of landlord policy, prerogative, alleged supervision charges, and interest rates. It must be remembered that the tenant's actual income is very different from the earnings of his farm as listed in agricultural reports. The landlord's share is taken from the earnings together with the operator's gross expenses.

For the small number of all these 2,000 tenant families who received a cash income in 1933, the average was

$105.43. The actual earnings per family, when distributed among five persons, would give a monthly income per person of $1.75. And these incomes, theoretically at least, were benefiting from the federal program of aid to farmers as administered in 1933.

Tenants in general have to consider themselves fortunate if they can farm for subsistence only. One cropper complained dismally: "For 18 years we ain't cleared a thing or made any real money." Another had received his cash in a manner which made it difficult to remember the amounts: "I couldn't possibly go to task and tell you. I got it in dribbles and couldn't keep a record of it, but it wasn't over $75.00." Still another farmer "cleared $45.00 last year; nothing the year before and no settlement; cleared $117.00 the year before that. The most I ever cleared was $260.00—just before the war." Few of the tenants interviewed had cleared cash incomes since 1921, and many had made nothing since the World War.

There could, perhaps, be some compensation for low incomes if the farms were supplying food for the families. But the production of a cash crop rules out the raising of general produce. This much is obvious: if there is any advantage in cotton farming as a profitable business, the tenant does not share it.

How the Tenant Lives

Cotton has always been a cheap-labor crop; its development has rested on keeping this labor cost low. In fact many declare that profit is impossible "if all the labor it requires were paid for." The results appear in the living standards of the millions of families whose men, women, and children produce the crop.

The cultural landscape of the cotton belt has been described as a "miserable panorama of unpainted shacks, rain-gullied fields, straggling fences, rattle-trap Fords, dirt, poverty, disease, drudgery, and monotony that stretches for a thousand miles across the cotton belt." It used to be said that "cotton is and must remain a black man's crop, not a white man's, because the former's standard of living has always been low, and his natural inferiority makes it unnecessary to change it." Now that white families make up nearly two-thirds of the workers, it is clear that meager and pinched living is not a racial trait but a result of the system of cotton tenancy. Submerged beneath the system which he supports, the cotton tenant's standard of living approaches the level of bare animal existence. The traditional status of the slave required only subsistence. The cotton slave—white or colored—has inherited a rôle in which comfort, education, and self-development have no place. For the type of labor he performs, all that is actually required is a stomach indifferently filled, a shack to sleep in, some old jeans to cover his nakedness.

This age-old condition of the cotton worker and the necessity to keep it unchanged, lead to some interesting rationalizing by supporters of the existing order. Serious statements about the happiness of the tenant in his dependent rôle are taking the place of the earlier [illegible] of the contentment of the slaves. Anecdotes of ludicrous spending whenever he gets his hands on money are used to justify the regular condition of poverty. Shiftlessness and laziness are reported as reasons for the dependent state, whereas, in fact, in so far as they exist, they are not necessarily inherent, but are caused by the very conditions of the share-cropping system.

The studies made of tenant families confirm the indignant assertion of a writer in the Dallas, Texas, *News* that "the squalid condition of the cotton raisers of the South is a disgrace to the southern people. They stay in shacks, thousands of which are unfit to house animals, much less human beings. Their children are born under such conditions of medical treatment, food and clothing, as would make an Eskimo rejoice that he did not live in a cotton growing country."

The drab ugliness of tenant houses might be condoned if they were comfortable. Many of them are old, some have actually come down from the period of slavery, and all of them, unpainted and weather-beaten, appear ageless. They are crudely constructed, windows and doors are out of alignment, they leak even while still new. Family size and size of house have no relationship. Whatever the number in the family it must occupy the customary three rooms. In fact a family of [illegible] [illegible] may live in a two-room house; as many as thirteen have been found living in a single bedroom and kitchen.

A Children's Bureau study of the welfare of children in cotton-growing areas of Texas, showed 64 per cent of the white and 77 per cent of the Negro families living under conditions of housing congestion, and this in spite of the common belief that over-crowding is a phenomenon of the city. Another study of white tenant families in Tennessee estimated an average value of all personal belongings of tenants at less than a hundred dollars. In one cotton-growing county of Alabama, reported in *Shadow of the Plantation*, over half of the families lived in one- and two-room cabins, and the comment on the character and inadequacy of these by one of the tenants does not exaggerate the lot of this majority: "My house is so rotten you can jest take up the boards in your hands and cromple 'em up. Everything done swunk about it."

Although living on abundant land in the south temperate zone, tenant families have probably the most meager and ill-balanced diet of any large group in America. Devotion to the single cash-crop, and the fact that food crops mature during the same season as cotton, make it virtually impossible under the system to raise subsistence crops. Because the growing of household produce does not fit into the economy of a cash-crop, it is not encouraged by landlords, whose prerogative it is to determine the crops grown. As a result the diet is limited largely to imported foods, made available through the commissaries and local stores. The diet may be, and commonly is, strained down to the notorious three M's,–meat (fat salt pork), meal, and molasses. Evidence of the slow ravages of this diet are to be found in the widespread incidence of pellagra, which Dr. Joseph Goldberger of the United States Public Health Service bluntly attributes to lack of proper food. This diet is a part of the very culture of tenancy, supported by habit, convenience, and cheapness. A dietary survey reported by Rupert B. Vance revealed significantly that the maize kernel constituted 23 per cent of the total food intake of white Tennessee and Georgia mountaineers, 32.5 per cent of that of southern Negroes, chiefly tenant farmers, but only 1.6 per cent of that of northern families in comfortable circumstances. Pork–chiefly fat salt pork–makes up 40 per cent of the food of southern tenant farmers.

Food is the largest item in the tenant's budget, and since almost no food is produced, it must be purchased. In six counties, the average monthly expenditure for food in 1934 was $12.34, or about $3.08 per week for the average family of five. As small as these amounts seem, they consume the major portion of the tenant's income.

FURNISHING

The current credit used by share tenants is commonly known as "furnishing." The landlord furnishes his tenants with food and other necessities during the crop production period and is paid for these advances out of the tenants' share of the crop in the settlement at harvest time. The usual rationing consists of furnishing groceries from the commissary to a tenant and his family. The tenant does not know the money value of what he is receiving or, to be more exact, he does not know what he is being charged for it. Variations of furnishing are the less frequently used "account" from which the tenant makes purchases with some knowledge of what he is being charged, and the "limit," whereby the landlord allows the tenant commodities up to some fixed amount.

Under the "rations" system the tenant receives little, and often suffers rank exploitation. In some instances large plantations allot to each laborer two pecks of meal and four pounds of fat back pork every two weeks. Some of the landlords are even more niggardly, providing tenants only meal and leaving them to provide meat as best they can. The testimony of tenants, supported by the observation of bare cupboards, points to extreme meagerness.

> We can't get any flour, snuff, shoes, sugar, coffee, thread or anything from the landlord but meat and meal. We have a divil of a time. No soap, soda, or salt. Can't borrow a dime, not a damn cent. If this ain't hell, I'll eat you. We work our damn heads off and git nothing. The harder we work, the deeper in debt we gits.

The restriction of the landlord's advance does not, however, prevent a heavy debt at the close of the year.

> Boss said after we's gathered the crop last year, I still owed him $130.00. Sometimes we got less than 15 pounds of meat and two bushels of meal every two weeks.

A Negro woman reported her conversation with her landlord, about furnishing, and his sympathetic response:

> Yesterday, Mr. —, the boss man, come through the field and asked me how I feel. I just stopped my hoeing and said, "Mr. —, I just don't know how I feel." He says, "What's the trouble, Julia, don't you feel well?" I say, "I'm just hungry, Mr. —." "Ain't you got nothing to eat at your house, Julia?" "I ain't got nothing but fat back and corn bread, and I done eat that so long that I believe I got the pellagacy, Mr. —." His face turns red when I say that, and he said, "Well, Saturday I'm gonna give you some flour too. Just come by the office."

The amounts allowed tenants under the several systems of furnishing and the period over which the credit extends are determined by the landlord. The "margin of progress" possible to the tenant is generally so small that he is constantly dependent upon credit at any terms. The amounts croppers receive are not sufficient for a family by any standard of adequacy. The fact that millions live and work under these conditions offers little ground for national pride when death and sickness rates are included in the picture.

No Incentive to Improvement

Since the tenant has no legal claims on any improvements he may make, he has no interest in conserving or improving either the land or the buildings. On the contrary, just as it is to his advantage to rob the soil of its fertility, so he is tempted to burn for firewood rails from any nearby fence or planks from the porch floor or from an outhouse—if the place happens to be distinguished by having any movable materials that have not already succumbed to the ravages of time and tenants. The tenant is not likely to trouble to make any repairs that are not absolutely necessary, and these few will be so made as not to outlast his stay on the place.

Under a system which does not encourage labor and thrift men easily develop habits of improvidence. As matters now stand, the tenant who really works on his place, who labors to restore the soil, who repairs and builds, is merely inviting his landlord to raise his rent. If he should use all his time and energy in improving the place on which he lives, with the hope of ultimately raising his own status, the tenant would have no recourse if his landlord demanded a higher rent or notified him that he would have to leave the next year. It may be argued that landlords generally would not follow any such course; but the absence of any laws on the statute books of the southern states protecting tenants in improvements made by them is a final answer to such arguments. Those who say that legal protection for the tenant is unnecessary, that we have too many laws, will have difficulty in justifying the crop lien laws which protect the immediate interests of the merchants and landlords, but ignore the immediate interests of the tenants and the long-time interests of every one in the region.

Is it any wonder, then, that the soil is exhausted, buildings not fit for habitation, and the tenants themselves thoroughly inured to habits and attitudes that, if undisturbed, will keep them impoverished? There can be no general prosperity among any class for long in such an environment.

WHAT THE STATUS OF TENANCY MEANS

It is a notorious and shameful fact that the stock arguments employed against any serious efforts to improve the lot of the cotton tenant are based upon the very social and cultural conditions which tenancy itself creates. The mobility of the tenant, his dependence, his lack of ambition, shiftlessness, his ignorance and poverty, the lethargy of his pellagra-ridden body, provide a ready excuse for keeping him under a stern paternalistic control. There is not a single trait alleged which, where true, does not owe its source and continuance to the imposed status itself.

The status of tenancy demands complete dependence; it requires no education and demands no initiative, since the landlord assumes the prerogative of direction in the choice of crop, the method by which it shall be cultivated, and how and when and where it shall be sold. He keeps the records and determines the earnings. Through the commissary or credit merchant, even the choice of diet is determined. The landlord can determine the kind and amount of schooling for the children, the extent to which they may share benefits intended for all the people. He may even determine the relief they receive in the extremity of their distress. He controls the courts, the agencies of law enforcement and, as in the case of share-croppers in eastern Arkansas, can effectively thwart any efforts at organization to protect their meager rights.

The present system is so constructed that the landless remain landless and the propertyless remain propertyless. To accumulate property, to increase independence, is to oppose the system itself. In a plantation area it is easier to be a cropper and conform to the system than to be a small owner or renter. For a share tenant to rise above his status he must overcome insuperable obstacles: (1) the agriculture that he knows fits only the old system, (2) the banks cannot finance him because they are geared to finance the plantations, (3) the cost of merchant credit dissipates his accumulated working capital, and (4) the crop lien credit system has destroyed his independence in the marketing of his crop.

Neither ambition, nor thrift, nor self-respect can thrive in such a climate. Not only is it impossible to develop a hardy stock of ambitious farm owners—the persistent American ideal—but it is impossible to avoid physical and moral decadence.

If the tenant is lazy, this is a result of his mode of life. As a Mississippian, H. Snyder, writing candidly in the *North American Review*, observes: "Certainly the common run of people in the South are poor, and we are told this poverty is born of their laziness. But this is upside down, as their laziness is born of their poverty."

Attempts to justify the existing system of tenure on the score that it is an adaptation to the latent and innate characteristics and capacities of the southern farm population are as baseless as they are vicious. All such observable characteristics can be traced directly to the system of tenure and the mode of livelihood that it promotes. The system, says Arthur N. Moore of the Georgia Experiment Station, does not provide ". . . a friendly atmosphere for the development of latent capacities."

Such in brief detail is the life of the tenant—drear, meager, and changeless. Upon this is reared an agricultural system which custom and a temporary federal subsidy are holding together against the insistent need of complete reorganization.

Let us now look for a moment at certain other central features of the industry of cotton culture.

This selection is excerpted from The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy by Charles Johnson, Edwin Embree, and W.W. Alexander. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1935.

SHARE TENANTS AND CROPPERS

THE SOUTH HAS MORE FARM TENANTS AND POORER TENANTS THAN ANY other section of the country. More than half of the farmers of this region are tenants. The depression and the crop control program of the AAA combined to center national attention on the problem of cotton tenancy, particularly in eastern Arkansas, where a recent rapid expansion of cotton production gave way to a reduction. The problem persists, somewhat as the weather, with nearly every one talking about it and no one finding an immediate and effective way of doing anything about it. It is significant that a majority of the South's farm tenants today are white men. The Negro group switched from a majority to a minority some years ago, though still predominating in the share-cropper bracket of tenancy.* In addition to tenants and croppers, there are more than 200,000 wage-hands on Southern farms and plantations, and whites are numbered in these ranks. White supremacy is rather obsolete as an argument or explanation for the plantation system. There are hillbilly whites in the servile class, and some of them are articulate. These hillbillies, sooner or later. must be served, either by political intelligence or by demagoguery. The Negro minority, moreover, can not be segregated permanently in economic docility.

The acquisitive cotton economy has always had serious shortcomings. Before the Civil War one of these shortcomings was slavery, which was supplanted after the war by share tenancy. The break-up of the slavery plantation, as Arthur Raper observes, was a "preface to peasantry," the lowly peasantry of share tenants and croppers. The darker phases of the cotton tenant system have been recently intensified and publicized. The cause of the share cropper has been championed more or less sincerely by left-wing critics of the New Deal and more or less insincerely by commercial Tories whose interest and status have been linked with the expansion of cotton economy and its impoverished tenancy. Members of both of these groups issued volleys of criticism against the AAA for the plight of cotton tenants without seeing the problem as a whole and in historical perspective. It must be remembered that the ills of tenancy are cumulative, compounded of many causes, and accompanied by other ills. The institution of tenancy as it exists in the South has been analyzed and indicted by farm journals and farm prophets for more than a generation. The tenant farmers' unions were preceded many years by upcountry Populists and Farmers' Alliance members in calling attention to the forgotten men of the plow-handles. The more recent discussion of tenancy has been characterized by its voluminousness and by the variety of the critics, embracing bankers, college professors, journalists, government officials and labor leaders.* One of the severest words which I have heard on the subject was delivered by the head of a well-managed plantation which is incorporated. The evils of Southern farm tenancy have been extensively explained, but they can not be explained away.

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* "Share tenant" is the broader term and is frequently used to include "share cropper."

The westward movement of cotton production in the nineteen-twenties left millions of abandoned acres and countless groups of stranded farmers in its wake, with special hardships on many tenants, who generally were poorly prepared to cope with the problems of mechanization, the boll weevil and erosion. The spread of industrial unemployment during the depression reversed the cityward drift of population and pushed thousands of crop-seeking "squatters" into the country. The comparative disadvantage of agriculture since the World War impelled many a landlord to "take it out" on his tenants, while the impasse of indebtedness in the face of fallen land values and commodity prices precluded large numbers of landlords from administering even the accepted code of landlord-tenant relationships. There are Federal Land Bank authorities who think that in the depression the landlords took a greater "licking" than the tenants, though there is an abundance of Relief Administration evidence to the contrary.

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* See the Selected Bibliography at the end of this book for recent writings and documents on farm tenancy.

The pattern of Southern farm tenancy has been set primarily by share croppers, secondarily by share tenants, and historically by the Negro dependent group. Those other tenants, who pay a fixed rent in cash or product, are too few in numbers to affect the system, particularly in the Southeast. The share tenant owns or furnishes the equipment and work animals for making the crop, paying a share rent, which is generally one fourth of the cotton and one third of the grain he produces. The share cropper furnishes no equipment or work animals, having everything but labor furnished by the landlord, who receives a rental which is generally one half of the total crop, sometimes more for highly productive lands. The commercial fertilizer bill may be divided between landlord and tenant or cropper on the basis of their respective shares of the crop. The cropper is more dependent upon the landlord for the "furnish" of food and other necessities, which must be paid for out of the cropper's share of the crop. However, a large proportion of share tenants feel a similar dependency. The customary rental is for one year, with no guarantee either to landowner or to tenant of permanency or of remuneration for more than minimum performance. Hence, the minimum performance, on either side, becomes both the rule and the necessity.

Lords of cotton lands have often been able, by circumstance, custom or compulsion, to secure tenant labor for special crops of their own or for other plantation projects at excessively low wages, even for advance credit on time accounts or payment in kind. This relationship is somewhat suggestive of an economy of the "middle ages without the cathedrals." It partly explains the generally low level of farm wages in many parts of the South. The farm tenant system furnished a sort of strategic retreat from Appomattox for Southern planter-colonels and their yeomen colleagues of the up-country. It made possible the perpetuation of economic slavery and the defeat of the major issue of social democracy in Reconstruction. It helped at the same time to hold the cotton kingdom as vassal territory to the larger commercial centers. Cotton tenancy was an important factor in linking the articulate South as a minority partner with the financial East rather than with the agricultural West.

The attempt just after the Civil War to shift the operation of plantations and large farms from slavery to a strict wage-labor basis was shortlived as a general practice. The Federal Commissioner of Agriculture reported in 1867 that in the South the wage system "generally proved unprofitable, the freedmen being inclined to use too freely their newly-found liberty, and planters—quite as little at home in the management of free labor." Moreover, many planters, including important new planters from the North, came to grief with the wage-labor system, coupled with the sudden drop in the price of cotton soon after the war. This speculative bad luck led to a break-up of plantation holdings and an eventual reconcentration on the basis of the tenant method of operation. The only way to carry on a commercial agriculture with plantation units and a minimum of actual cash was on a credit basis, and the crop lien offered the best bid for credit in those times. The share tenant or share cropper became the ultimate shock-absorber, going from year to year with little or no money and with his crop given as security or pledge in advance for his simple purchases. He bore much of the brunt for the local scarcity of liquid capital.

The tenant was more or less at the mercy of his landlord or his local merchant. The landlord's lien on the growing crop, as security for supplies furnished the tenant, was by law made automatically a prior claim without requirement for any written or recorded instrument. The landlord had to "stand" security for his tenants if he wished a merchant other than himself to "furnish" them. The creditor kept the accounts, and it is historically correct to say he preferred or dictated that the debtor or tenant plant a maximum amount of cotton, for such a policy meant more business, even if it also meant unbalanced farming and a lower standard of living for the farmer in the long-run. As Reconstruction yielded to "white supremacy," Negroes discarded the phrase "forty acres an' a mule" and subscribed to the couplet,

" 'Ought's an 'ought an' figger's a figger;
All fer de white man an' none fer de nigger."

More cotton and one-crop farmers became the order of the day, and it was not infrequently a matter of going to town "to buy some more corn to raise some more cotton to buy some more corn . . ." and so on in an endless cycle of poverty. Garden plots for croppers were sometimes denied or not encouraged, lest gardening interfere with the cultivation of cotton. White tillers became engulfed in the system of tenancy to face low earnings and partial idleness along with Negroes. The system expanded into the hills, capturing the best lands, so to speak, just as had the former system of slavery. Both systems tended to avoid the poorer soil, which thus remained free to support a more diversified farming and a more democratic society.

By 1880 the proportion of tenant farms in the South was forty per cent above the proportion for the country as a whole. Henry W. Grady, noting a "reappearing of the planter princes," observed that the trend of civilization based on cotton culture was still "indeterminate." Writing on "Cotton and Its Kingdom" in *Harper's Magazine* for October, 1881, he raised the question whether cotton "shall bring the South to independence or to beggary," and said further, "Whether its culture shall result in a host of croppers without money or credit, appealing to the granaries of the West against famine, paying toll to usurers at home, and mortgaging their crops to speculators abroad even before it is planted—a planting oligarchy of money-lenders, who have usurped the land through foreclosure, and hold by the ever-growing margin between a grasping lender and an enforced borrower—or a prosperous self-respecting race of small farmers, cultivating their own lands, living upon their own resources, controlling their crops until they are sold, and independent alike of usurers and provision brokers—which of these shall be the outcome of cotton culture the future must determine. . . ."

After half a century, what have we? Not what Henry Grady hoped for, but what he feared. In 1930 Mississippi tenants were seventy-two per cent of all farmers. For Georgia the figure was sixty-eight per cent, for Louisiana sixty-seven per cent, for South Carolina and Alabama sixty-five per cent, for Arkansas sixty-three per cent, and for Oklahoma and Texas sixty-one per cent. The deepening of the depression of the present decade tended to spread the system of tenancy into communities formerly immune from it. Mountain farms became tenant farms to an unheard-of extent, as mountaineers went on relief. Many owners sank into tenancy, while many tenants became farm wage-hands. In nearly all counties of the cotton belt in 1935 more than half the farms were operated by tenants and croppers.

Southern white tenants showed a numerical increase of more than 200,000 in the nineteen-twenties, while Negro tenants registered a slight decrease. The South's million white tenants now outnumber the Negro tenants by more than 300,000. White farmers who own their farms greatly outnumber the Negro owner-operators, and it is now true that white farmers predominate in the production of the South's cotton. A minority of white farmers and a large majority of all Negro farmers, however, are croppers. The average value of Negro cropper farm units, including buildings, in the South in 1935 was only $845, according to agricultural census estimates, though the corresponding average for whites was $1,406. The white croppers of Mississippi cultivated farms of slightly lower average value than the colored croppers.

Share croppers and share tenants on encumbered holdings fare ill in hard times, and they have a rather high mobility in good times. Much of this mobility is restricted to the local community or county. There are efficiently operated tenant plantations, with landlords or supervisors on the ground, and there are examples of successful share tenants and croppers with little or no supervision. I know tenants, a few Negro tenants, who own their own stock and equipment free of debt and have made a living for years on lands of absentee owners. But, for the South as a whole, such cases are exceptional. Absentee ownership and gross inefficiency are associated on too many middle-size holdings of the region, holdings which can not carry the overhead of expert management, and yet can not be operated effectively without management. Too much plantation supervision is not scientific but amateurish and intermittent.

Many Southern tenants live or exist in rural slums, often adjacent to standing timber and other building resources. Large families often make out with two or three rooms. It has been said without serious damage to truth that many a tenant could study astronomy through the openings in the roof and geology through holes in the floor of his tumble-down shack, while the scarcity of furniture would permit a removal by the simple process of spitting in the fire and calling the dog. One can see, however, a few tenant houses, which have screened doors and windows. There are instances of tenants living in respectable homes, which were formerly occupied by the owners. These houses generally have only fading evidences of paint. Sanitary privies are frequently lacking, and it is occasionally necessary to go hundreds of yards for good drinking water. The diet is at times restricted to "meat, meal and molasses," the meat being "sowbelly." There may be field peas, and there may be rabbits and opossums in season, for many a cropper has a hound or two. Milk to drink may be as scarce as champagne, with sweet potatoes as the nearest possible substitute for milk for small children. Lack of education is sometimes the explanation for the unbalanced diet of tenant families. The majority of these families of the South have a very low plane of living, as measured by their houses, their food, their clothing, and the things they do without.

If a cropper's gross cotton earnings, including the landlord's share, amount to only $153.60, the average for a Mississippi county in 1933, any kind of a standard of living is impossible. Decent living would be difficult on the basis of cotton earnings for five other sample counties in Southern states, with the county average ranging from $166.50 to $822.50 per tenant before deducting the rent, as brought out by field studies. There is little room for optimism in a WPA study released in 1937, showing that the average income of wage-hands, share croppers and other tenants in eleven Southern areas in 1934 was $309 per family or $73 per person. This average seems low, but many farmers fall below it. Farm tenancy in the South is "an expression of poverty." With more machinery, more croppers, nearly three fourths still remain such." Less than one tenth had become owners. He correctly condemns the system as disadvantageous to both landlord and tenant. The former has to depend on an unstable and irresponsible type of tenant, and any landlord who individually endeavors to raise the level or status of his tenants may suffer loss. There are enlightened planters who have tried uplift policies only to have their improved tenants enticed away by other planters. The unscrupulous landlord has tended to profit more than the socially minded landlord and to set the pace, while it has been the most incompetent cropper who has tended to set the pace, or to slow the pace, for tenants in the vicious system.

The tenants are largely victims of a social rather than a biological heritage. Their shiftlessness is primarily the result of generations of tenancy, of a reconciled sense of exploitation, of going to bed tired and getting up without hope. The individual landlord is unable to check the influence of the system, by which personality traits of tenancy and dependency, so to speak, are acquired, developed, and handed down, with an increasing accommodation to a dependent status as a normal condition. Individual and social inertia results. Yet the basis of dependency is distinctly precarious, as was brought home to thousands of tenants after 1929.

It is false to assume that share croppers and share tenants are humanly hopeless. Croppers, of both races, have become managing share tenants under my observation, and share tenants have become owners and operators of farms. Large family groups in the up-country often include thrifty owners of poor lands and typical tenants of good lands, the human difference being entirely of environmental cause. Children of tenant families have moved out of the stratum under the stimulus of education. I can point out share croppers whose lack of education, not of native ability, is the chief reason for their remaining share croppers. Though thousands are inevitably doomed, other thousands are capable of elevation through improvement in their opportunity and environment. Malaria and the hookworm have put the poorer rural people of the South at a decided disadvantage, and other ailments, such as pellagra, represent the effect of white farmers, and a higher production per man, the Southwest has tenant problems somewhat different from those of the Southeast, but none the less critical, particularly among farmers who lack the capital and the equipment, for modernized farming is not immune from failure.

The farm tenant system of the South affects the attitude and outlook of landlords somewhat as slavery influenced the minds of masters. The servile class is held to have the predestined lot for which it seems fitted and from which there can and should be no rise or escape. Landlords of long experience can be heard to say that the inferior status of share croppers, white as well as black, is inevitably due to an inferior ability. This view precludes any public interest in an "agricultural ladder" for the unfortunates. Indifference, if not opposition, to reform is natural. Exploitation, perchance softened by paternalism, seems to be the landlord's right and the tenant's expectation. Many landlords have opposed upsetting the landlord-tenant relationship, as Emergency Relief Administration investigators discovered. Landlords generally do not wish this relationship disturbed, and many tenants have developed a psychological attitude of dependence.

The typical landlord's idea of tenancy is only a half-truth. It is more accurate to say that tenancy breeds ignorance and ignorance breeds more tenancy, that both keep farmers submerged, and that neither tenancy nor ignorance can be cured without curing the other. Lack of education and lack of economic hope combine to kill initiative and to prevent interest in livestock, machinery, farm improvements, or farm organization. Tenants, if they would, could not easily act together for group production, buying, processing, or selling, except to the limited extent a landlord may enforce common action among his own croppers, as in sharing and exchanging work, largely for economy in the use of the landlord's tools and equipment.

Once a share cropper, always a share cropper, is almost an apt analysis, if allowance be made for shifts to common wage labor in industry or agriculture. Harold Hoffsommer, in an Alabama Relief Administration study of several hundred cases, found that "of those who started farming as share poor folks' restricted food habits. These and other environmental factors may explain much of that backwardness which has been attributed to heredity. There is no special evidence of inherent inferiority of the "poor whites" of the South as a class, if allowance be made for economic and social conditions. There is no rigid racial subdivision between "poor whites" and other whites who are poor, though there may be results of differences in the intensity and period of exposure to poverty. A certain amount of social sifting has taken place over the years with the large migration from the countryside. The exodus has included many of the active, skilled and best educated members of tenant families, though many willing farmers remain on the land. I recall members who have become urban carpenters, grocery salesmen, peace-time soldiers, textile workers and followers of "public works." They have found improvement of status away from the farm, not on it. Many who know little but stereotyped methods of farming are left behind for landlords to choose from, and the unchosen include not a few incompetents, who emphasize the degradation of the picture.

It is not safe to generalize too freely about farm tenancy in the South in view of the economic and geographical variety of the institution. But there is little argument for retaining it in its prevailing form. There is no constructive feature of it which can not be as well or better provided by other methods. It signifies no efficient or large-scale production but only a conglomeration of small farming units, a centralized control, in part, of the business phases and of the profits, if and when there are any. It discourages the use of intensive types and methods of agriculture, which are imperative for successful small-scale farming. It offers the tenant few or no incentives to conserve or improve the land, buildings, or other property of the owner, and it offers the owner little gain or profit for making the physical life more comfortable for his tenants. "The tenant skins the land, and the landlord skins the tenant," it has been said, and he who can skins the landlord. It is the dynamics of poverty. But it has filled a large place in our Southern economy and it can not be wished away.

Elevation of the share cropper class can not be achieved in a day. Many issues are involved in the South's systemic disease of tenancy and in any reduction or redirection of it. Tenancy and our whole farm life are intimately linked with rural commerce, towns and villages. It is important to observe the role which these factors play and fail to play in the farm drama of the South.

This selection is excerpted from Forty Acres and Steel Mules by Herman Clarence Nixon, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1938.

by William Spier

These nineteenth century farmers generally labored alone with their families, cleared small parcels of land for a cash crop, and ate what they could catch, raise, and grow. Luther Milton, whose father came to Independence County a few years after the Civil War, recalled how farmers reproduced their life in the bottoms, where he was born ninety-one years ago.

Did most of the people back in those days, say 1906 and 1907, make a living farming, or did they work in the timber, or how did they make a living?

They made a livin' by raisin' garden stuff 'n killin' rabbits. They eatin' possums. Did you ever eat a possum?

Uh, no, don't believe I ever did.

We . . . as far as I know . . . I've heard of it . . . but as far as I know we never et a rattlesnake. But I suppose they're good.

I've heard people say so . . .

I never did either, but I never know'd none of them old people eatin' a rattlesnake. But I suppose they're good to eat, cuz we ate everythin' else here. . . .

Well, were there any of these big saw mills going back long 1905, '06?

When we first come here, no. They cut down these little ol' trees 'n there wasn't a stick of lumber 'n none of the log fences ya had. I was born in a little ol' log pen.

The working life on small Independence County farms required creativity and continuous hard work. Attaining even the simplest comforts involved time-consuming labor from all members of the family. A pattern of self-sufficiency quickly emerged and was broken only occasionally, as when a farmer would travel to the nearest store for coffee and sugar.

Some of the poorest among them, recalled Albert Wilson, former miner and farmer, substituted sorghum molasses for the sugar and parched corn for coffee. Besides the money obtained from growing a few acres of cotton and raising some livestock, very little cash was seen by these farmers in the early years of this century.

The following article highlights a number of the features of the sub-economy which united these self-sufficient farms. Derived from lengthy interviews with people whose families have tilled the soil for generations, it focuses first on the relationship of farmers to landlords, and then on the early introduction of outside banking and government.

I.

By 1910, 3,683 farms in Independence County covered 224,121 acres, of which, 92,280 were improved farmland for an average of twenty-three improved acres per farm. Half of these farms were farmed by share or cash tenancy, either by individual farmers or by tenants and property owners together. The county, in 1910, had a total population of 24,776 persons, of which, 17,114 or 69 per cent, inhabited farms. A significant number of the remaining male population probably worked in related enterprises such as ginning, farm supply, and marketing. Although Batesville was a major marketing center for northern Arkansas and contained several small companies, agrarian enterprise dominated activity in the county.

Three types of farming arrangements prevailed in the early 1900's, all carried over from older arrangements that existed in ante-bellum years. Tenant farming involved a man who would supply his own machinery, seed, and general equipment and would rent a parcel of another man's land for either cash or share rent. Under a second type, sharecropping, the individual would supply only his labor and would receive a smaller portion of the harvest. However, sharecropping appeared more commonly in the black plantation areas to the east and southeast than in predominantly white Independence County. The third form was individual family farming: a man owned his own property and supplied his own labor and materials. Structurally, this latter type of farming, involving roughly half of all Independence County farmers, differed from tenant arrangements; yet the following pages illustrate that the arrangements were intimately tied to each other. Tenancy did not withdraw incentive to improve physical plants and production, and often, as agreements between poor farmers, it cooperatized farming of cotton and stimulated localized services.

Although large landholdings were few in number in these early years, they represented one form of landlord-tenant relations. Colonel V.Y. Cook, Civil War and Spanish-American War veteran, typified a landlord considerably more wealthy than his tenants. He owned 6,337 acres of bottom land around Oil Trough Bottoms, an area notable for large plantations. Colonel Cook's records show that between 1898 and 1922 thirty-five tenant farmers worked a "thriving business" on his land.

One such tenant farmer, O.C. Cook, now lives near the old site of Elmo, Arkansas. In an interview

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with Cook, A.C. McGinnis, editor of the *Independence County Chronicle*, discussed the land as it was then:

> O.C. Cook, who is no relation to Colonel Cook, began farming for himself in 1904, at the age of twenty-one. Describing the area at that time, he says that only about twenty-five per cent of the land had been cleared for farming. The remainder of the land was forest of huge white and red oak trees with dense canebrakes along the river and scattered here and there among the big trees. A characteristic of the virgin forest was that there was no underbrush; a man could ride horseback through the trees without difficulty.*

Before he could even begin to farm the land, O.C. Cook had to cut the logs and, using five mules, haul them out of the bottoms over rough country with no roads. O.C. Cook's original agreement with the Colonel called for payment of a one-fourth share rent. He made his first crop of six bales of cotton in 1904 on five acres of cleared land. In 1905, he continued this arrangement with the Colonel (who then lived in Oil Trough) and farmed forty-five acres of land. The soil was rich, and he made enough that year to buy a Studebaker wagon for $45, a one-row cultivator, a breaking plow, a one-row planter and a Georgia Tooth, all tools necessary for making a crop. When harvest time came along he had enough cash to hire the children of neighbors for thirty-five cents a day to chop cotton. All in all, he was on his way to becoming a successful farmer.

Colonel Cook remained in the bottoms until 1908, when he moved to Batesville, the only sizable town in the county. McGinnis said the decision for this move probably came with the "increasing use of automobiles which made it possible for him to travel between Oil Trough and Batesville, at least in good weather." And, O.C. Cook remembered the "Colonel coming to the farm in his Maxwell, driven by a chauffeur."

Once established in Batesville, the Colonel delegated the administration of the land to a third party, the Pelley Brothers, Asa and Erwin, of nearby Dunnington. The new arrangement called for the Pelley Brothers to operate Colonel Cook's gin, rent out his land, and pay Cook $4 for each acre rented. They in turn charged tenants at the "usual one-fourth of the cotton and one-third of the corn and other crops," thus freeing the Colonel from any direct administration of his property in Oil Trough Bottoms.

Cook's formalized relations with his tenants, administrators and ginners, emerged in the form of written contracts. "Colonel Cook always did business by the pencil," O.C. Cook recalled, "and he never took your word for anything and never expected you to take his." It is not known if he used written contracts before his move to Batesville, but with his move he had access to lawyers and legal authority. He contracted the Pelley Brothers to administer his affairs in the "Bottoms" until 1917, when he once again resumed direct control over his property. Remaining in Batesville, Colonel Cook, a very wealthy man, engaged in banking and other enterprises until his death in 1922.

Normally, landlords did not charge tenants rent for houses they might occupy on the farmer's land. But a typical contract used by Colonel Cook in 1915 (see box) shows he received five dollars per acre for all uncultivated land where dwellings and barns stood. The contract required the farmer to take all crops to Cook's gin, and assume all responsibility for damage to buildings on rented property. After delivering the crops to the gin, the tenant must "deposit in such bank or trust company as they (trustees) may designate the full amount of the proceeds or receipts on all crops sold." From this clause it can be assumed that Cook reviewed, from a distance, all income, and then paid the farmer. O.C. Cook said he complied with the requirement to take his cotton only to "the gin of V.Y. Cook," and paid five dollars per bale for ginning or one-twelfth a toll in lint. Since cash was scarce, customs allowed for a man to pay his debts with a toll or percentage of his procedure, which would eventually be turned into cash. What appears to be a reflection of Colonel Cook's practicality in covering his interests with a legal contract is more a reflection on his distrust for the people who had been working for his interests for fifteen years or more.

In a separate contract Colonel Cook required that his ginners "keep sharp watch and advise said Cook promptly of any of the tenants on his land not bringing his or their cotton to their said gin at Oil Trough to be ginned." In other words, he appointed his ginners as spies, and held them responsible for every bale of cotton farmed on his 6,000-plus acres. If his ginners failed to look after his interests, that is, if he discovered that cotton from his property found its way to another gin, they were to nevertheless pay Cook the one dollar per bale due him out of their own pockets and collect it from his tenants if they desired to make up their own losses. The ginners were to report by mail every day all the transactions of that day.

Although Colonel Cook's departure from the Oil Trough Bottoms in 1908 signified the weakening of personal feudal bonds with O.C. Cook and other tenants, he still retained some degree of paternal authority over them. In August, 1915, the White River flooded and left the bottom land farmers no time to replant. As a result, unless tenants could come up with cash (since they had no crops and were liable for damages), they faced violation of the contract between themselves and Colonel Cook. However, Colonel Cook absorbed the loss and paid tenants for the little they could grow. There was little else he could do in these extreme circumstances. His tenants already faced destitution, and his administrators had gone bankrupt. As old-timer Paul Goodwin said, good tenant farmers were hard to find, and Cook probably did not wish to lose their services.

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*This quote and others related to Mr. O.C. Cook are found in A.C. McGinnis, "Farming in Oil Trough, 1904 — 1960."

Another of the Colonel's paternal gestures concerned the construction of a church at Elmo, a few years prior to 1920. O.C. Cook believed it was Colonel Cook's idea to build the non-denominational church for his tenants. Although Colonel Cook did not attend this church, his position as an educated banker and one of the largest landholders in the "Bottoms," allowed him to assume responsibility for financing the new building. He accomplished this by charging each one of his tenants a twenty-five cents "tithe" per acre of crop land rented from him. Country churches outside of Batesville were usually built and financed directly by local farmers and laborers, rather than by Cook's unusual method of raising money to hire a contractor. Cash was so scarce that the imposition of a tax would have met with at least some resistance — unless someone was in the position to coerce people to contribute. Colonel V.Y. Cook had such power. The money was collected, the church built, and if there were any objections to the manner in which he financed it, they are not known.

II.

Landholdings the size of V.Y. Cook's were few in number in Independence County. The Colonel's relations with his tenants were more formal than those between small farmers and their tenants, but at least Cook did not involve himself in the vicious peonage through debt-credit that permeated the eastern counties. While the relationship between Colonel Cook and his tenants was basically one of a petty bourgeois landlord and peasant farmers, the

TYPICAL CONTRACT BETWEEN LANDOWNER AND TENANT

THIS WRITING WITNESSETH: That I have this day rented from A.B. Pelley, _________ acres of land, more or less, for the year 1915, on the farm belonging to V.Y. Cook in Independence County, Arkansas, known by said Cook as the _________ for _________ dollars, due and payable on the first day of September, 1915, _________ acres of which is to be planted in Cotton, and _________ acres in corn and all of said cotton to be ginner at the gin of V.Y. Cook, leased to and controlled and operated by said A.B. Pelley, or wherever the said Cook may elect, until the above rent, together with all supplies which the said Cook may furnish during the present year, is fully paid.

Said cotton is to be marked at Newport, and all of the proceeds thereof is to apply on the rents of the above lands due from A.B. Pelley to V.Y. Cook until the said Cook is fully paid, and when the said Cook is paid in full then the amount so paid the said Cook is to be deducted from the amount due the said A.B. Pelley under the terms of this contract.

It is further understood and agreed that the rent on lands in alfalfa, or other earlier crops, shall become due and payable as soon as the crop matures, which shall be made ready for market promptly thereafter. But at the option of the said V.Y. Cook he may forbear for a period, in which case such crop is to be stored in a good dry place and insured in favor of said Cook and his interest may appear.

And in consideration of said lands having been rented to us by the said A.B. Pelley, we do hereby agree to work and cultivate same thoroughly and in a good and husbandlike manner, and at all times subject to supervision of the said Pelley, or his accredited agent, and to pay therefore, as rent, one-third of all the corn and one-fourth of all the cotton and _________ raised on said land during said crops as promptly as may be possible, and to deliver the cotton at the V.Y. Cook gin or at such other place as the said Cook may designate hereafter, and to deliver all corn and other crops grown on said V.Y. Cook farm, except such part as may be set apart to us as our individual share of said crop, at such place or places as the said Pelley may designate and direct.

It is further understood and agreed that the house, barns, etc., on said lands occupy _________ acres of land and not subject to cultivation, therefore we agree to pay as rent the sum of $5 per acre during said year.

I also agree to pay and damage done or caused to be done through negligence or carelessness of mine, of members of my family or my employees, to the buildings occupied and controlled by us on said lands, and that we will not permit any of the buildings on said lands to be occupied in any manner for any length of time by any other person than myself or our employees.

It is also understood and agreed that if we fail to work said crops, or refuse to work or cultivate said land as above set-out then the said Pelley shall have the right to enter same at any time and employ any additional labor and complete the work of planting, cultivating, marketing or gathering of said crops, and after the same has been gathered and marketed, he shall first deduct therefrom the amount due him and damages, then reimburse himself for such amount as he may have spent in working said land, crops, etc., as stated, and after applying the balance in settlement of such amount or amounts as we may then owe him for advances made us by him, he shall pay any residue remaining to us or our heirs.

It is also agreed that the action above outlined shall be optional on the said Pelley's part, and if instead of taking the above indicated action if he so prefers, he may permit us to finish the cultivation, gathering, and marketing of said crops in my own way, and instead of charging us as a rent a portion of said crops, as above mentioned, he may charge me against said crop at the rate of $ _________ cash per acre as standing rent for said year.

It is further understood and agreed by me that the money rent due V.Y. Cook for said land is to be paid in cash and that nothing in this contract is to be in any way modify, retard or hinder him in the collection of said rent, and that this contract is not assignable or transferrable by me.*

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*Contract courtesy of John Morros, Jr., Batesville, Arkansas.

relationship between small farmers and their tenants was characterized by personal agreements and marked by one or both being free to expand the farming interests and extended services to the local economy.

Once cotton left the hands of the small farmer, his contact with the external capitalist markets ended. The farmer received the price offered to him for his cotton, and that price was low, depressed by many middle men taking profits, including the railroads which amassed wealth on the farmers' sweat. For small farmers who lacked the capital to invest in more advanced farm implements, cotton farming remained labor intensive, with a strong reliance on the extended family and local labor during planting and harvesting seasons.

John Ellis recalls that tenant farming was usually done by the poorer people. "No matter how poor yer was," he said, "they was always people that was poor." He recalls that often a sharecropper might be kinfolk, perhaps a son just starting off on his own. Neil Northcutt said that sharecropping arrangements were always welcome unless a farmer had a large family who could assist him. Sometimes these small farms resembled communal farms, with several families of kinfolk working one farm and living in separate dwellings. There was plenty of labor to work the fields and informal agreements in the splitting of the proceeds. Although these arrangements continually dissolved, kin usually stayed close by, extending cooperative activities beyond the structural limits of one farm. Several of the older people interviewed were related to each other through blood or marriage, and indicated they had lived with one or more of the others on the same farm when younger.

Rural communities actually grew in this manner, and, at the same time, widened the boundaries of local economy. Personal ties expanded and encouraged farmers to engage in services outside the subsistance farm. The cash crop, cotton, was important in that it circulated cash within the local economy, alongside traded items. It also served to add new commodities to the countryside experience. But at this time, cash was scarce, and a farmer could not depend on it for what he needed; other forms of value exchange developed. For example, sharecropping or paying rent and debts with a share of one's crop rather than cash accounted for over a thousand farm operations in the county in 1910. Although it was not always a permanent arrangement, the narratives attest that it was a beneficial arrangement in that it lessened the concentration on cotton growing and allowed for expansion of services. These relations offered a flexibility for both the farmer and the share tenant. Unlike relations with absentee landlords, such as Colonel Cook, the arrangements remained personal and stimulated the local economy.

One such small farmer who extended his interests with the help of a sharecropper was Hugh Moore's father. The elder Moore owned 157½ acres of land in the early years of this century — starting off very small and accumulating first "ten and then 7½ and then 40 and then 20 acres that happened to be joined." Compared to his neighbors, Hugh Moore's father was quite successful:

> He usually would have someone working with him or for him (a sharecropper). He spent most of his time — except when a harvesting the crops — buying cattle, horses, or trading, and he would have someone hired or in the hills. We had a man live who made what we call a sharecrop with us. And we would furnish the seed and fertilizer and the team and the machinery and everything else, and had a man who was an old bachelor and four sisters, and they would work the crop, and we'd split the proceeds. Pop would get up at four o'clock in the morning, and he'd get in usually in the summertime after dark.

By having a sharecrop tenant "working for or with him," Hugh Moore's father freed himself to expand into cattle and stallion breeding and trading with his neighbors, without sacrificing the cash income gained from a cotton crop. This local enterprise is very important in that it served to perpetuate a partially insulated economy, one not dependent on services or commodities produced outside the area of comfortable movement. Of all that the Moore farm produced — cotton, corn, wheat, cattle, horses, mules and hogs — only the cotton was destined for markets outside the rural countryside.

With the expansion of interests, Hugh said that his father learned related skills which he offered as services.

> My father was also a veterinarian on his own. He would castrate cattle for himself, mules and hogs for other people. We would go around in communities around Oil Trough, Magness and Rosie, neighbors go in together and bring ten or twelve mule colts there together and we would castrate them.
>
> *Would you say that other farmers had different skills other people in the county needed?*
>
> Yes, that was quite common. There were some who could do things better than others and would go around sellin' these skills.

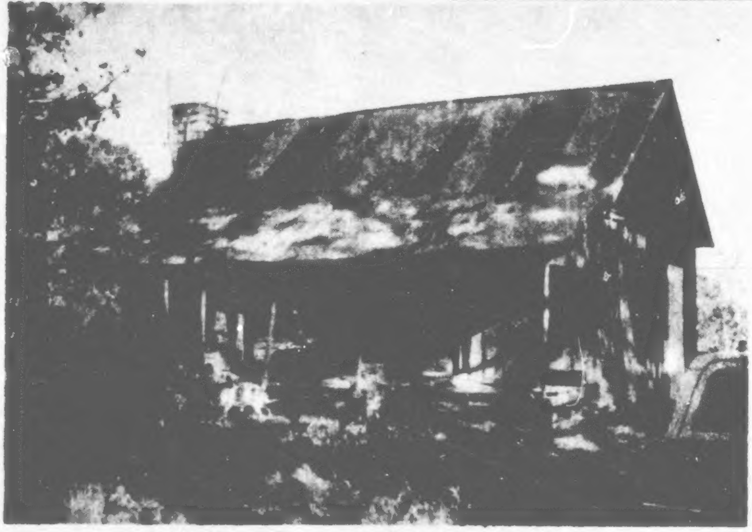
John Ellis' and Hugh Moore's fathers both shod horses for a little extra money. John Ellis said that cotton was still the major source of cash, with other interests, mostly involving tolls, small cash transfers, and trading.

John Thompson, age ninety, remembered that his father owned a scarce farm implement, a wheat thresher. Owning such a piece of machinery was

Luther Milton and his family.

Photos by William Spier

Luther Milton demonstrates how he still prepares meals over a fireplace with a dutch oven.



Home of Luther Milton, Dowdy, Arkansas.

considered a very valuable asset, and customary tolls rather than cash were charged by the owner for the service.

> My dad get a thresher called a "Ground hog" and they'd thresh the wheat, round the neighbors and they'd run it through that cylinder and knock the wheat out and they'd rake a straw up and then they'd put that chaff of wheat in a pad, they call it, and they'd turn that by hand, pan that chaff out. Finally they got it separated and go all over the country you know, my brother went with it, my dad never did go with it. But anyway he'd go and they'd take so much toll, so much out of each bushel. After it was over with he'd take the wagon and he had a certain place to go and the other fellas, four of them they had a certain place they go and pick this toll up and bring it in and they haul it to Batesville and sell. 'Stead of takin' cash, people didn't have cash then, they couldn' pay for it, havin' it threshed. They'd take so much, like ginnin' cotton. They'd take so many pounds of cotton out of a thousand pounds, you see. . . . Whoever had their wheat threshed, say, fed the threshing crew. Some of them'd be close enough to come to go back, stay all night. Most of 'em whoever had their wheat threshed why fed the crews, and they'd sleep on the floor on the porch, lots of times in the halls of these old double logged houses.

John Ellis remembered bailing crews who would also travel to farms, "set overnight," and do the hay bailing for one-seventh toll payment. "We visited people we wouldn't see very often," said John Thompson, recalling the circuits they would travel as an important social event where men could be together a day or two to talk and generally renew acquaintances.

Hugh Moore recalled that other people sold their surplus. They would circulate throughout the area offering grain, fruit or beef. Moore could not recall exactly if anyone had a personal monopoly on any service or product, but he assumed that "to be the way they operated." For example, a wheat thresher was a considerable investment for a poor farmer, so other farmers would rely on the few men who had threshers for service. Since tolls were generally uniform, and several wheat threshers were not needed in any one area, competition was discouraged in favor of expansion into other services.

Some of the poorest of the hill farmers, Albert Wilson remembered, were tied to their farms in the growing seasons, but worked in the mines during the winter to gain a little cash. "You worked hard all year," said Wilson. "Of course, in the winter time you cut a little wood and hauled and sold that. I've sold lots of chicken pens and grapes, catch old possums and sell their hides for a nickel and a dime." Cows provided another important source of extra income for farm families, for milk consistently remained a cash commodity throughout this period. A poem in the *Batesville Daily Guard* (October 16, 1923) exaggerates the probable monetary return from a few cows, but nonetheless reflects both the activity of local peasant economy and the growing dependency on banks for credit. Entitled "A Farm Wife's Ode to the Cream Can," one passage reads:

> And when another baby comes,
> We add another cow,
> And look around and trade a bit,
> Annex another sow.

And another passage reads:

> With coats of fine silk
> The proceeds from the stock and crop
> Go into the bank,
> The cream can has paid all our bills.
> We have the can to thank.

Trading certainly dominated relations in an economy with a scarcity of cash and limited contact with the markets. Many farmers said that there were years during the first quarter of the century when they received as little as five cents per pound for their cotton. An average farmer might do ten bales per year and make less than $200. When he finished paying off debts and purchased supplies for the coming year, there was little need for a bank. If a farmer lived near Batesville, perhaps in Desha, Moorefield or Sulphur Rock, his contact with merchants and bankers was generally more frequent than if he lived in the "Bottoms." People in the countryside, ten or twelve miles from Batesville, kept their cash very close to their persons; the money was of no use to them in Batesville banks when purchases and debts were locally incurred.

"What I remember about tradin' with neighbors," said Neil Northcutt, "was that when you had somethin', yeh offered it to them first, before yeh sold it, if yeh could." Traveling was so difficult that if a farmer could not trade with neighbors, he became isolated. Trading, hunting, church-going and visiting served as the only social life a farmer and his family had. In retrospect, one can imagine the fear and anxiety countryside communities felt during the Civil War when their entire world of balanced personal services and relations was threatened or destroyed.

III.

Survival for small farms frequently depended on securing readily available cash from local money lenders. Cash transactions existed alongside common barter and were most important in purchasing fertilizer and machinery for cotton farming. Specific people throughout the countryside offered loans to farmers who needed perhaps ten or fifteen dollars to buy supplies for a cotton crop. These local money lenders were usually farmers themselves, but they had managed through frugality to put a bit of money aside.

A system of informal countryside banking emerg-

Photo by Pat Goudvis

ed from this accumulation of capital. Instead of traveling inconvenient miles to Batesville for a more complicated intimidating transaction, farmers could go to known lenders for money. Paul Goodwin recalled that he never had enough money to put into a bank and that banks were distrusted by poor farmers, especially since they inflicted such harsh penalties for payment defaults.

> *Did people hesitate going to banks when they needed cash?*
>
> Back then, oh yea, man kep his money close. Sometimes I 'member when a bank would take away a man's land for not payin' 'em back on time, you see. You know, sometimes a bank would get a man to take out too much money, credit you see, and that man couldn't pay it back.

While Paul Goodwin said that banks were generally distrusted, they were not exclusively used by the wealthier farmers. John Thompson, whose father was a poor farmer, said that in the spring, "Dad wouldn't have enough money to pay our taxes," so he would go to Batesville to borrow cash.

> He'd go in to several places, take me along, and went into the First National Bank, and he told John Q. Wolfe, who used to be the cashier at the bank, and Nathan Adler used to be President of the bank. An John comes in there and wants some money, picks out a note and signs my name to it. We'd borrow ten or twelve, fifteen dollars, and then we'd that Fall, we'd sell a bale a cotton or two, and he'd go in and pay it off. He'd float it from one bank to another. He went to school seven days in his life, my father, and he made it to higher arithmetic.

John Thompson recalled that "We wasn't afraid to go to the bank, 'cause Nathan Adler was a friend and I used to work for him." But Thompson admitted that most people he knew had a distrust of banks and would go to local money lenders instead.

> Yes, banks charged high interest if they thought you could not pay it back on time. It wasn't equal, and people didn't like that.

Another reason for the slow recognition of banks was the well-established personal relations between small farmers and local money lenders. These relations were characterized by flexible, but not always uniform, arrangements. One money lender might ask for a note, the other nothing. Unlike the banks, these local money lenders would give a farmer as much time as he needed to pay back the loan.

Owens Fetzer had an uncle who loaned out money, and who safeguarded his loan by securing a deed of mortgage from a justice of the peace.

> *Do you remember any of the local money lenders?*
>
> Yea. Well, one I remember very well was my uncle. He lived down there. James Hale. His people was from Alabama. And he worked hard and saved, and he

> saved, and he saved, and he got some money. He had a bankroll. He kept it at home and a man only needed $25 then, $30 would help him make a crop. Well, he'd come there and borrow that money from my uncle, and he'd fix up the mortgage, go and have it recorded, deed of trust. And that man'd come back, with interest, of course, and pay him.
>
> *What is a deed of mortgage?*
>
> Well, he would come to him and tell him, "I'll pay you a small amount of it, but I failed," and my uncle would let the other go with interest. Once in a great while I known him to loan some dishonest men, but when he got through with them, that was all. They would not get any more from anyone.

Fetzer was sure that most of the local money lenders were not as cautious and demanding as his uncle, and he insisted that people would loan money because, "When a man told you a thing, you could depend on that." John Thompson recalled the flexibility of monetary transactions.

> Well, they'd loan it out, $25 for so long. Take out $25 and hand it to him, no note. He'd go on and, well, time would come due and he'd go to him and pay part of it and say, "I haven't got the rest, but I'll pay it back as I can get it."

If you were tight one year you could go to Luther Milton, John Coles or Ewell Churchill's father, to whom your "word was your note."

When I asked Luther Milton, who has outlived his debtors, if money lenders received interest, he laughingly replied, "Well, yea, you got interest, sometimes yea." The fact is that Luther and the other informal bankers received a usurious ten per cent interest.* Victoria Forrester recalled a money lender from Cord.

> Well, yes, you could borrow money from Ewell Churchill's father (a store owner in Cord). This son-and-law of mine say that you go to him and say, "Mr. Dave, I need so and so." He'd go get it, but okay, you knowed you gonna pay it back. So you'd pay it back with ten per cent interest. I am sure there was many more who operated. . . .

IV.

This informal system of banking helped retard bank accumulation in these early years of the century. By 1900, Batesville was a marketing center for north Arkansas, but the small farming economy continued to thrive in the countryside. The introduction of automobiles and roads slowly brought farmers into town and introduced more commodities into countryside life. When asked why roads were not built before the 1920's, Neil Northcutt replied, "We could get around to where we wanted to go." Luther Milton recalled the first time he ever came into contact with government in the "Bottoms" — when they came to conscript local men to build roads.

> *Were the roads dug here, in pretty bad condition? When did they first make a good road out here?*
>
> A good road! A good road! A few days ago! From Batesville to Cord was a mudhole, and now sometimes now they worked three days out of the year, when I was twenty-one, worked three days out of the year.
>
> *You mean everybody twenty-one years old and older was required to work the roads?*
>
> **Buster Milton, Luther's son:** — Yea, he cut some grass and put in them holes. They didn't all work.
>
> *You being a good citizen, you worked the roads?*
>
> **Luther:** — I get out of it if I could, if I couldn't, I worked it.

Remember," said Luther Milton, "when they chased these young fellers all over the county to do the roads."

The state and federal governments were making more frequent contacts with rural farmers in the early years of this century. Clearly, their objectives were to stimulate rural production and bring the farmer out of his insulated community. Small farmers consistently opposed interference in rural Independence County; and their resistance often erupted into violence. Such was the response to the enforcement of federal cattle dipping and stock laws. In order to rid cattle of fever carrying ticks, farmers were required, by law, to drive their cattle to the dipping vats. With the scarcity of roads, this was a considerable inconvenience to many farmers. To compound the farmer's reluctance, vat solutions were sometimes too strong and cattle died. Owens and Lola Fetzer recalled the importance of cattle to farmers and the farmers' anger at interference with their source of livelihood:

> **Owens Fetzer:** — The fever tick killed our cattle here, and they started dippin' long around 1915. Well, they dipped those cattle in this solution, and some of

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*Although ten per cent interest is quite usurious, it was not compared to the interest charged to small cotton farmers by banks. Bizzell in his monograph on the evils of farm tenancy, documents examples of banks throughout Texas and Arkansas consistantly charging sixty per cent interest or higher! "Tenancy," wrote Bizzel, "results in the hopelessness of acquiring a farm home, intranciency, thriftlessness and inefficiency." Never calling these high interest rates usuary, Bizzell justified the profit. Wherever this usuary occured, one can be sure that counter-finances were made available by local money lenders at a "reasonable" ten per cent interest.

> it, they got it too strong and they killed some cattle. Well, that created lots of trouble around here. They felt that they was killin' their cattle and they objected. But it was a mistake; the government didn't.
>
> **Lola Fetzer:** — People depended on their cows for milk and butter, you know.
>
> **Owens Fetzer:** — And there was quite a opposition to it. However, you see, we was under federal quarantine. We couldn't ship cattle to St. Louis or anyplace, only after November.

The enactment of stock laws also brought quick and violent reaction from countryside farmers. The laws insisted that farmers fence in their cattle, in a move to protect crops and gardens from the trampling of hungry animals. Fencing in cattle was time consuming and expensive; moreover, if a farmer did not have a stream or pond on his property, where would his cattle get water unless he terraced his farm and dug a pond?

> **Lola Fetzer:** — Another thin' that brought on trouble was the stock laws. When, a long time after we moved here, our cows run outside and maybe they'd come up in the evenin' and maybe they wouldn't. But, then they had the stock law, and we thought that that was just terrible. You had to keep your stock up and feed them, once you fenced them in.
>
> *How did people protest against the cattle dipping and stock laws?*
>
> **Lola Fetzer:** — They had their little farms fenced in. They didn't cultivate all the land.
>
> **Owens Fetzer:** — A man killed another south of Batesville once.
>
> **Lola Fetzer:** — What they did cultivate, they had to fence in.
>
> **Owens Fetzer:** — This dippin', they killed a man up there. He's a government. Shot him. Because they felt like people, you see, when they get in their minds that you're imposing on them, naturally they get desperate. And they couldn't see it any other way. I can't recall exactly when they started this dippin'. But I do remember a man losing his life.

John Ellis said the "people didn't want nobody tellin' them how to do their farmin', and the government was doin' so then." "I don't think they had anything against the government, but they didn't have much faith in politicians," recalled Owens Fetzer.

> They thought they was bein' imposed on. And they didn't think about startin' a rebellion or anything like that, you know. But they said, "You're tryin' to run me over." Thought they was against them. It wasn't the government, but the government's agents. They thought it was the agents tryin' to go against them, not the government.

The occasional intrusion by the federal or state government appears to be the only conflict small farmers had with the "state." There were local sheriffs and justices of the peace, and for serious crimes, penalties would be dealt out in Batesville courts. But the effect of state intrusion had not been felt consistently since the Civil War. Luther Milton said he had no use for politicans and had not voted since 1915, the year he assisted a local politician whose opponent bought the election. Luther recalled that the man elected was so corrupt that he stole all the money used to hold court. As a result, Luther said, "the moonshiners was sellin' to each other." Buster Milton remembered that most disputes between farmers were settled by the farmers themselves and that very often "they killed each other."

> **A.C. McGinnis:** — You know, I was over here one time at where Mr. Fast used to live. I was out on his farm one day an he is tellin' me where a little house used to be down there, an he says there was a woman murdered down there. I was tellin' that to someone out here, and he said that Cord was a mean place then. The people didn't have any roads, they couldn't go anywhere, they didn't have anything to do; and he said they had lots of whiskey stills 'round here. Did you ever hear of anything like that?
>
> **Buster:** — Yes sir, they killed each other all the time. There was no law around here then. I remember 'em tellin' about that woman bein' killed, right down there. Says he got her pregnant. He settled it thata way. No, there's no law around here then.
>
> **Luther:** — Well sir, I want to tell yeh. . . . what did he say? Cord was a mean place?
>
> *Yes sir, just what he said.*
>
> **Luther:** — I don't know how mean it was, but there was a lots of fightin' and they kill one another. But now then I'll tell yeh that I do know that happened. The man that had this here store, had four mules and a good wagon and he'd go to Newport and he get a load of whiskey and he'd come back here with this whiskey, and it was agin the law to sell this whiskey fer him. Now here's the way he done it — he's pretty slick. You come here and bring me yer money, and I'll bring you the whiskey, and he'd put it down on this here piece of paper. And when he would come back, he would bring you that whiskey, whoever it was you know, and he'd get drunk. He'd git into it. Some of whuppin' whiskey. And that's what happened; not too many stills, but later, further on down the line, yes they got plenty of 'em. Moonshines. Back then you went to Newport and brought it up here. I'm gonna tell yeh what I seen, boys seen too. If probably he had a pint or a quart or whatever he had, he just drink it up. Sometimes he just lie down out there and just lay there. He couldn't get up or he couldn't fight nobody or nothin'. He just be drunk as $700. They killed one another, too.

V.

Changes in personal relations came slowly to the Independence County countryside. While small industry flourished in Batesville during the first quarter of the century, relations in the rural areas remained tied to kinship, home production, and a cash and barter economy. This certainly was not a romantic life; disagreements very often ended in violence after a few bottles of corn liquor. Yet the farmers interviewed for this study looked back on their relations with friends and neighbors as having a very special quality, one no longer apparent. Some bemoaned the fact that mechanical farming depleted the area of neighbors. Mrs. Massey regretted that holiday traditions of the family have given way to the distance between members of her family. Owens Fetzer, who farmed around Newark and Cord his whole life, said:

> When I moved, I don't mean to discredit the country or anything. There was hardly nobody livin' here at all. And when a man told you a thing, you could depend on that. You differ from him politically or religiously, but his word was his bond. Sorry to say now, mister, that it's not thata way now.

Albert Wilson recalled the honesty of the people in the countryside:

> In the community where I was raised, before John come, I was raised that you helped a man when he was tight. I went and helped a man's crop and helped plow when he take down sick, after he get a crop started. You go down the road and lose somethin' off the wagon, and you got it back . . . you had it back in two days time. And don't care what you lose you don't get it back now. There were some who were more freer to help than others.

"Well, you know," said John Ellis, "we was all poor then, and we needed to do so much for ourselves to live. It was part of life to help your neighbors when they needed it." Owens Fetzer noted, "You're on your own now, but of course there's a higher standard of living now." "There's reason to be bitter about the present," pointed out John Ellis. "It's especially hard now that I am very old."

"Yes, in those days," said Victoria Forrester, "we stayed close by . . . we didn't go way out yonder. We went where we could walk. As neighbors, we really had neighbors then, now you go a long time to learn the names of the people across the street."

The small farmers of Independence County understood their own poverty and brought about a balance of relations with the land and their neighbors, whereby the difficulty of that poverty was alleviated. The consistency of these relations is impressive. The investments of an industrial society had all along neglected the masses of southern farmers; but these small agriculturalists had developed and retained a way of life insulated from dependence on capital's precious markets. Rural sociologists, the ministers of rural capitalism, indicted the farmer for his unproductivity and ignorance. In reality, however, the so-called "victim" of his own ignorance was not a victim at all, but a humble man who, in the early years of this century threatened to make capital his victim. With its bias toward capital accumulation and expansion, the "state" eventually had to eliminate the problem of peasants in a land bent on national urban growth.

Photo by William Spier

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SELECTED READINGS ON RECOVERY PROGRAMS OF THE ROOSEVELT ADMINISTRATION

15

GOVERNMENT AND "FARM RELIEF"

IN order to make any reasoning appraisal of the federal government's attempt to "aid agriculture" it is highly advisable to notice, at least briefly, the principal highlights of the administration of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

From numerous evidences I deduce that the American reading public in general is not well acquainted with the ways and functioning of this unique agency in government. This truth is not at all astonishing. The AAA came into being as just another frenzied ladling of "alphabet soup." Its birth date was May 12, 1933, and before the complex, clumsily worded act could be interpreted, much less enforced, seed had been planted and new crops for that year were already growing.

Initial administration of the law resulted in a most fantastic saga of plowing under crops, of pitiless slaughter of baby pigs, and depletion of livestock herds, together with legalized and rather idiotic sabotage of fields of growing crops. We read of young livestock being slaughtered and thrown into rivers, of stores of grain being burned, of confused Negroes of the cottonlands struggling to make confused mules walk along cotton rows and plow up the "king crop"; how the mules, traditionally whammed for stepping on growing cotton, were suddenly to be cursed and beaten for not stepping on it. A peace-abiding, hard-working yeomanry was about as confused as the cotton-plowing mules. For men, as well as mules, had considered production of needed crops a valid and honorable work, and they had good reason to consider destruction of such crops for motives of bureaucratic bribery an immoral and disgraceful behavior.

Building to the torrential confusion was a rather ill-smelling

smoke screen of politics which straightway engulfed the working arena of the AAA. Politics, alas! still baffle and confuse the panorama of farm "relief." This is regrettable. But in common justice to farmers, bureaucrats, and New Planners alike, the marauding of politics does not disprove the ideology or the possible solvency of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

The stated purpose of the AAA is the administration "of certain legislation designed to raise farm income to the level more equitable with non-farm income, to conserve soil resources and to protect generally the interests of producers and consumers of farm products."

The AAA goals are stipulated briefly as follows: "acreage allotment to insure a production of major food, feed and fibre crops adequate to meet domestic, export and reserve requirements; payments to farmers to assist farmers in meeting the costs of practices which prevent the erosion and maintain soil fertility; parity payments to help bridge the gap between market price and parity price for basic farm products; loan on crops stored in the Ever-Normal Granary; and marketing quotas when needed and approved by the growers themselves."

> "The AAA farm program is made effective by the co-operation of individual farmers, who by their participation, become members of county associations. For the country as a whole there are more than three thousand such associations, which in turn encompass about the same number of county committees, and more than 24,000 community committees. Committeemen are elected by the members from their own numbers and are in charge of the actual administration of the program locally. [County agricultural agents now employed on a co-operative basis between federal, state and county governments in most agricultural counties of this nation, serve as ex-officio referees for the work.] . . .
>
> "Seventy-two per cent, or about 320,693,000 acres of the total crop land of the United States was covered by applications for payments under the 1938 program. Soil building practices were carried out as follows: legumes and legume mixtures (nitrogen restoring crops), permanent pasture, green manure and cover crops were newly seeded on 55,318,000 acres; lime and fertilizers totalling 5,547,000 tons were applied; forest tree practices were utilized on 197,000 acres, and pasture practice on about 3,000,000 acres; protected summer fallow, contour farming, and listing were carried out on 15,990,000 acres, and terracing was utilized to the extent of 392 million linear feet.
>
> "It is estimated that more than five million agricultural producers in all parts of the United States participated in the 1938 AAA program. Conservation payments under the 1938 program totalled $443,699,000. . . .
>
> "Under the 1939 AAA program the national goal for all soil-depleting crops was set at from 270 to 285 million acres. In arriving at this goal was given to the current supply and demand situation for each crop, the acreage required to supply

domestic and export needs, and adequate reserves, and the requirements of soil conservation.

"National goals for individual crops were set as follows: wheat 55 to 60 million acres; cotton 27 to 29 million acres; corn 94 to 97 million acres; potatoes 3,100,000 acres; rice 850,000 to 880,000 acres; tobacco 1,480,000 to 1,570,000. . . . Under the Department of Agriculture Appropriation Act of for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1940, a sum not to exceed $599,560,000 was appropriated for payments under the 1939 conservation program. . . .

"In addition to the conservation payments growers who planted within their 1939 acreage allotment of cotton, corn, wheat and rice, received parity or price adjustment payments under provision of the Price Adjustment Act of 1938 which appropriated $212,000,000 for that purpose.

"This act provided that price adjustment payments should be made in 1939 on the five crops named as basic in the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, if their average farm price was less than 75 percent of parity or the 1914 index. Thus participating cotton growers in 1939 were able to earn conservation payments of 1.8 cents a pound and parity payments of 1.6 cents per pound on their crops; wheat growers could earn 17 cents and 11 cents per bushel in conservation and parity payments respectively; corn growers 9 and 6 cents per bushel; and rice growers 9 to 12 cents per hundred weight. Since the 1938 farm price of each kind of tobacco was above 75 percent of parity, no price adjustment payments were authorized on that crop in 1939. Tobacco producers who complied with the conservation program were eligible to receive from 0.8 cents to 1.26 cents per pound on the normal yield of their production; peanut growers $3.00 per ton; and potato growers 3 cents per bushel. For farms which had general crop allotments, the rate for 1939 was 99 cents per acre, adjusted for the farm's productivity.

"The Ever-Normal Granary, made possible by the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, was made effective by loans on the 1938 crops, stored surpluses of the commodity serving as collateral. The loans were extended through the Commodity Credit Corporation. The wheat loan on the 1938 crop was the first to be offered to wheat producers, although loans had been made [illegible] corn and cotton, as well as on other agricultural commodities, in previous years. Under the 1938 wheat program loans were made on more than 84 million bushels of wheat at farm rates averaging about 60 cents per bushel. A loan program on 1939 wheat, announced at rates ranging from 50 to 80 cents per bushel, got under way at the end of the fiscal year 1939. There loans were extended on wheat stored either on the farms or held in commercial storage.

"As of June 30, 1939, 1939 total corn under the loan amounted to approximately 257 million bushels of which about 227 million bushels were from the 1938 crop. The loan was 57 cents a bushel.

"As of June 30, 1939, total cotton stocks under loan amounted to approximately 11 million bales of the 1934-35, 1937-38, and 1938-39 crops. However, as announced on August 19, 1939, the Commodity Credit Corporation assumed title to the 1934 cotton crop under Government loan, and on September 1, 1939, to the 1937 crop under loan. Under the 1938 cotton loan program loans averaging about 8.85 cents per pound were made on about 4,480,000 bales. On August 1, 1939, the maturity of the 1938 cotton loans was extended one year, to July 31, 1940.

"As authorized by the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, Government loans were also made available on 11 other agricultural commodities produced in 1938, including tobacco, wool, and mohair, turpentine, rosin, peanuts and hops. . . .

"For wheat, beginning in 1939, Federal Crop Insurance provided an auxiliary stabilizing measure. Under this program wheat growers put aside a portion of their crops as premiums to offset the possible crop failures. The cost of the insurance varies with the risk on the farms and in the county in which the farm is situated. To help stabilize market supplies, the program sets up an insurance reserve of actual wheat on which the insured farmers may draw when they have crop losses.

"To encourage further exports of wheat and to maintain the American producer's share of the world wheat market, the Government initiated an export subsidy program for wheat under which approximately 118 million bushels of wheatband flour have been sold for export as of June 30, 1939.

"The AAA reported the expenditure of $695,104,483 in the fiscal year 1938-1939. Administrative expenses exclusive of local farm committee were $19,631,823. Benefit payments included cotton adjustment payments for the 1938 crops, $121,663,660; soil conservation, $417,200,239; sugar, $61,294,887; and 1938 parity payments, $22,826,045."—Report of the Secretary of Agriculture, January, 1940.

All this comprises an epic of the evolution of a "trend" in national legislation.

The AAA was born of desperation. Its predecessor, the National Farm Board, hazily assembled by President Herbert Hoover and headed by the late Alexander Gegge, chairman of the board of the International Harvester Company (a plush-bottomed beneficiary of farm earnings), had fluked and flopped in appalling failure, leaving the government with unredeemable millions in wheat and cotton, leaving the farming public with the implied plea kindly to refrain from planting full acreage until the industrial capitalists had time and leisure to scrape together a few more billions, at which time all the fair land would again be lovely; two blades of grass would grow instead of one; and life in America would be just one big healthful game of medicine ball.

Agriculture, meanwhile, had been left to feed on such smug and hypocritical inferences. The farm income in 1932 collapsed to a running low of perhaps $5,000,000,000, or less than 40 per cent of the national farm income of 1929.

The year 1929 was the high-yield, big-value year of recent agrarian history. Yet according to statistics of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture, approximately half the farmers of the country produced less than $1,000 worth of products, including those consumed by the farm family, during that year.

The typical peasant farm of northern Europe produced a larger income during the same year (indeed, "peasant" farms of Germany, Holland, France, and Italy were yielding considerably more than $1,000 a year at the time of the outbreak of the European brawl of 1939).

About half of all our farms were in 1929, and are today, below the earning power of peasant farms of Europe. One-fourth of all our farms, roughly a million, produced total incomes of less than $600 a year, and 15 per cent of the farms produced less than $400 worth of products, which approximates coolie levels of Chinese agriculture for 1929. (This story, too, is entirely too true today.)

Thus, during the "banner year" of agriculture, more than 3,000,000 rural Americans were living on farms with aggregate incomes of less than $100 per capita. On the other hand, only 19 per cent of the farms produced more than $2,500 worth of products. Therefore, less than one-fifth of our farms produced more than 60 per cent of all farm goods raised in the United States; and the majority of these top-third farms were then, and are now, located within the boundaries of the corn belt.

A cycle of droughts beginning in 1929 proceeded to push at least one-fifth of all crop lands of the United States into acknowledged drought belts. A world-wide heyday of nationalism which encouraged nations to produce most or all needed food crops within home boundaries was clearly materializing. And export markets of United States farm crops fell to an all-time low of this century.

By 1933 a new political administration faced an old problem: a chronic agrarian ailment grown steadily worse. The initial mission was admittedly one of saving the elemental farm structure from ruin. There followed frantic condemnations of "ruining surpluses," and the incubation of an amazing credo, a highly synthetic "economy of scarcity." This credo projected strong and comparatively permanent walls about the entire nation. Quite feverishly it forgot that a crop surplus is a natural and habitual attribute of all productive land, that the validity of the term "surpluses" is highly relative to time and place, since a hundred varieties of surpluses may be changed to shortages within thirty days or thirty hours or, indeed, within thirty minutes.

Further, this rather illegitimate economy of scarcity has never recalled that industrial progress, so called, and the development of new commodities in merchandise traditionally begins with a cheap and easily available oversupply of some crop or mineral material,

whose availability as a surplus makes its commercial transformation feasible and lucrative; that to a compelling degree American inventions and American industries are aftermaths of surpluses of one kind or another.

Brain Trust gospels of the virtues in scarcity rested altogether too heavily on the quite phony adage that "the human stomach is the world's most inelastic consumer. When and if we eat more of one food we are certain to eat less of another."

Never has man propounded a sillier clatter of words. First, it is common knowledge that the entire consuming public of the entire country is not sufficiently fed today, was not adequately fed in 1933, probably has not been sufficiently fed in any year or calendar month since 1929—if then.

In terms of contemporary United States history, of the vast library of accredited agriculture research assembled by our Department of Agriculture, by testimony of audited food-clearance records of at least forty great market centers of the United States, the human stomach *is* an elastic consumer. Census records show quite clearly that poundage intake of domestic foods as a whole is increasing throughout the country. We are eating somewhat fewer pounds per year of such foods as flour, potatoes, sugar, and animal fats. But we are consuming hundreds of millions of additional pounds of fruits, green vegetables, fresh beef and mutton, fresh milk, cheese, and scores of other food crops. The scientifically accepted truth that human nutrition is measurable not in pounds and tons or yields per acre, but in calories and vitamins essential to a given body, further blasts the flimsy credo that the human stomach is an inelastic consumer.

There is also the truth that the economic denominator of agriculture is not merely one of human or animal nutrition, nor is it one of calories or vitamins, nor of the grocery-buying powers of millions of citizens. Today, as for generations past, the farmer is a producer of industrial materials, celluloses, fabrics, fertilizers, and capital goods, as well as food.

But the birth of the AAA was not characterized by lucid reasoning. The New Planners and the theretofore nonillustrious Brain Trusters had picked treacherous fields for academic platitudes. A little known, philosophically bent editor of a near-defunct, inherited, and once-prosperous farm magazine in Iowa was made Secretary of Agriculture. Henry Wallace was (and in my opinion still is) a sincere idealist. But he came to a monstrous job ill-prepared and generally uninformed on American agriculture outside of a limited part of the corn belt. In early plans he had the assistance of a creditable department of career students of agriculture. But his cluster of executive appointees were unproved and novice: in considerable part a rather declamatory multitude of discharged college teachers and unemployed journalists.

A nonfarm cluster of political adventurers, and failures or near-failures in private life, therefore found themselves appointed bureaucratic saviors of United States agriculture. Their assignment was "to do something quick."

Their first endeavor was to create and attempt to impose an artificial economy of scarcity. Their political predecessors had politely requested farmers to plant fewer acres without compensation for the doing. The New Deal compiled tables or bounties to be paid from the United States Treasury to farm proprietors who would pledge themselves to grow fewer acres of field crops.

The first planning displayed dangerous haste. Precedents in arbitrary crop reductions are almost uniformly discouraging. There was no reliable way accurately to imitate experiments in acre control of several European nations. One after another Brazil's attempts at government reduction of coffee production, Cuba's limitation of sugar milling, Britain's struggle to limit rubber production had flopped and fizzled almost within sight and hearing of our shores. The senile floundering of the Hoover Farm Board continued these lessons of reduction futility, further proving that it is woefully difficult for any nation which does not hold a production monopoly of a crop to reduce the acreage of that crop by emergency legislation and remain solvent.

But the New Deal for Agriculture, undaunted, chose a handful of crops, all with pronounced political affiliations, for benevolent subsidy. These harvests first included corn and hogs, wheat, cotton, cattle, tobacco, rice and sugar. Entries have been considerably shifted, but the selections were, and still remain, glaringly partisan. Production of the so-called "basic" crops subsidized particular farming areas without benefit to others. There are more than a hundred

"principal" farm crops grown in the United States; almost three hundred of mentionable importance to our national agricultrure.

But "basic" crops were chosen for purposes of expediency, and the huge and dramatic experiment was under headway. It was straightway evident that acreage reduction by subsidy was no satisfying answer to the dilemma. It was merely a first wedge to government supervision of land use. Farmers' "benefit" checks became as orthodox to the depressed thirties as Civil War pension checks had been to the fabulous nineties. Farm politics took renewed lease on life. Slowly and somewhat erratically, farm buying power began to climb. But poor farmers remained poor and tenants held to the traditional corn bread and creek water—as alas! they still do.

There was, and there is, admirable forwardness about the New Deal will to "do something about it," to make a decisive thrust toward coming to grips with a fundamental and long-neglected American dilemma. Henry Wallace and his colleagues have demonstrated a capacity to grow in administrative stature and to fight on gallantly in the face of overwhelming problems and doubts.

Good has come of the adventure. As one onlooker's opinion, it seems to me that the Soil Conservation Administration now shows the stripe of true legislative greatness. It makes visible in structure whereby farm owners may receive government co-operation in saving the fast-failing soil resources of this nation.

The principle of the Ever-Normal Granary is a rational expression of administrative thrift which almost without doubt would have delighted Benjamin Franklin, and probably would have pleased such founding fathers as Washington, Jefferson, Madison, James Wilson, and indeed Henry Clay. For the Ever-Normal Granary is a theory of commodity utility which time has not clearly disproved, a feasible defense against the "lean years" which are as staple to our agriculture as they were to the grain fields of old Egypt.

Lean years occasioned by droughts, fungi, or insect enemies have heretofore resulted direly for our farmers and consumers alike. Usually severe crop shortages hoist consumer's prices of both staple and occasional foods. As a rule, too, speculators, dealers, processors, and labor employed by them absorb the lion's share of increased prices, leaving the poor farmer and the poor consumer to grow poorer. Crop failures weaken and demoralize the entire agrarian structure. Left unattended, they force farmers to sacrifice livestock, to abandon improvement programs, to forfeit productive machinery, needed repairs, and maintenance. They hoist foreclosure rates, produce ruinous losses of valid earnings, turn more and more thousands of tenants and poor farmers on the open roads or on public charity.

In my opinion, therefore, the Ever-Normal Granary is, in principle, an enlightened legislation. So, most emphatically, is the principle of crop insurance, which is definitely "in the cards" as this book goes to press.

I believe the principle of crop loans by the federal government is likewise meritorious, at least so long as it does not "peg" the prices of commodities beyond buying range of the public or reasonable parity with other crops. Except in the instance of cotton, New Deal loans have thus far operated efficiently, without serious loss to the country and with acknowledged benefit to hundreds of thousands of farms. Farm credit and rural banking are important agrarian services in which commercial and private banking have failed to keep pace with farm majority needs. Usable crops, not mere lands, are the real measure of farm value and credit. The voracious banking practice of lending a farmer cash at exorbitant interest, and securing the loan by a throat-slitting mortgage on the entire farm plant only moves the pawnshop from the city's side street into the rural spaces. A crop loan embodies a just and solvent credit base. It can be abused. But I find myself unable to imagine any graver financial abuses than the destructive farm mortgage racket as practiced so glibly during the uproarious, bloodsucking twenties and as practiced today by some of our biggest and smuggest life insurance companies.

Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace, helmsman of the AAA, early elected himself its prophet of justification:

"At the opening of the first World War, our farm production chanced to be pretty well in hand. There was no glaring disparity between the prices that farmers received for their crops and the prices they paid for the things they had to buy. It is that condition of parity or balance between our major producting groups, attained more or less by chance in the years 1909-1914, which the Agricultural Adjustment Act is designed to restore.

"The first World War rushed us out headlong to world markets. Fifty million acres of Europe, not counting Russia, were out of

cultivation. Food prices rose. A new surge of pioneers strode forth upon those high and dusty plains, once called the Great American Desert, and found that they could grow wheat there. Throughout the country, sod was broken. Before the surge was over, we had put to the plow a vast new area. To replace 50 million lost acres of Europe, America had added 40 million acres to its tilled domain and thrown its whole farm plant into high gear. . . .

"After the World War, the Allies divided the world up, with a shrewd contending eye for the deficit acres; and the United States said it didn't want any. Disillusioned and confused by terrific adventures in our first war beyond the water and by the struggle at Versailles afterwards, we yearned only to come home quietly, expand some more within our own way within our own borders, and contend thereafter only among ourselves for the old spacious, separate spoils of 'normalcy.' . . .

"Accordingly the present administration is conducting an orderly retreat from surplus acreage. In essence, it is a program of government adjustment payments to cooperating farmers, rewarding a cooperative adjustment of acreage pro-rata farm by farm. . . . Our adjustment program must in its very nature be kept elastic. If or when world trade revives, we still can use to advantage our new social machinery for crop control. . . .

"It is a belief often expressed nowadays that men are born greedy, with a strong self-seeking strain of meanness inherent in their make-up; and that you can't change human nature. I cannot believe it. It sounds to me like a sheltering modern rationalization built from the despised Puritan concept that only man is vile. The real need now is not to change human nature, but to give it a new chance . . . I do not find that men, in general, whether you talk and work with them in the country or in great cities, are naturally mean. They want to amount to something on the face of the earth, naturally; but this impulse, unless distorted, does not naturally express itself in piling up excessive stocks of goods and money. Neither is it the natural instinct of man to want to get up the so-called Ladder of Success by tramping on his neighbors' faces. . . . That an enforced meanness has brought modern society a real menace, no one can deny. The breadlines testified to this reality; a million forced sales of farms in this country tell another part of the wretched story; and then you have only begun to take count of all the millions who live in constant and degrading fear that the same thing may happen to them tomorrow. . . .

"In an age when an advanced technology pours forth goods in a smothering abundance, fear of freezing to death and starving to death should be removed as a matter of common decency from the lives of civilized peoples as a whole. . . . This nation, and all the developed part of the world, has been terribly under the weight of the need to subsist, to keep body and soul together in the past few years. We can throw off that miserable burden. We can stand as free men in the sun. But we cannot dream our way into the future. We must be ready to make sacrifices to a known end. As we wrestle with all the infinite complexities which now beset us, the temptation is to give way to false and easy hopes and to easy ways of thinking. But we cannot afford to dream again until we have taken hold of things as they are."[2]

Tremendous as it has now become, the AAA is but one front of government relief for farmers. Roughly one-fifth of all work "relief" administered in the United States has gone to farm families and other rural people. In 1935, the peak year of agrarian relief, about two million rural families received money from the federal Treasury. More than a million farmers and farm laborers received some type of assistance from the federal government. These included 598,000 farm operators, 279,000 farm laborers who were heads of families, 135,000 cases under care of rural rehabilitation, and 166,000 displaced farmers or farm laborers living in cities. But at no time has the total of farm operators receiving relief grants or rehabilitation advances comprised more than 9 per cent of all farmers in the country (while 18 per cent is an average relief figure for urban families).

In twenty-one states the combined number of farm operators receiving relief grants or rehabilitation advances has remained less than 6 per cent of all farmers, and in thirteen states the ratio has been from 6 to 8 per cent. The states which have drawn the heaviest per capita handouts of rural relief are in this order: New Mexico, South Dakota, Oklahoma, Colorado, Kentucky, Florida, Idaho, Montana, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, South Carolina, and Wyoming. All but two of the latter states are in drought or poor-soil areas. Idaho, Montana, the Dakotas, and Minnesota adjoin the

amphitheater of recent and severe drought. Wyoming forms a connecting link with Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Arkansas in a chain of southwestern drought states which dip into, adjoin, or include the Dust Bowl. Kentucky and Pennsylvania reflect the growing insolvency of rough and failing soil of abandoned mine communities:

Any onlooker, from the traveling salesman, who learns of rural America through his Pullman window, to the most astute of rural research worker, learns that all farming populations are not tillers of soil. Statistically speaking, I know of no great farming areas in the United States where more than 80 per cent of the male citizenry of working age are actually cultivators of earth. Even in the most rural counties of the most rural states this generality holds. As a way of life, as an established order of society, agricultural requirements support population—storekeepers, traders, doctors, lawyers, teachers, brokers, carriers, hired laborers, veterinarians, smiths, and numerous other trades and professions—whose number varies with competency, crop prices, and seasonal or local needs.

Besides these more or less necessary participants in farming life, the farm realms draw others, perhaps less requisite but sometimes more colorful—millers and carders, water witches, midwives, confidence men, gypsies, livestock traders, fortunetellers, peddlers, and salesmen. And even though highways have come into virtually every one of our farming counties, even though airplanes dip through the always agrarian skies and automobiles come by the puttering millions, still farm lands support their villages of trade, their community life, their schools, and in the more flourishing realms, their churches and community centers.

Incidental trades and "support populations" continue to build a vital part of the pattern of rural life as they have in the past and as they evidentally will do in the future. Farm life can no longer be patterned wholly by farmers, and the challenge of land does not stop with wielders of hoe and plow.

It follows, however, that the great majority of rural support population must take its support from tillers' sweat and the legitimate harvests of growing fields. Although only about half of all rural workers are actually at farming, the fortunes of most of the nonfarm rural citizens rise and fall with those of the farmers. When farmers grow poor they cannot pay taxes, nor hire workmen, nor

Farm Operators in Rural Areas Receiving Relief Grants and Rehabilitation Advances, June, 1935, and Their Ratio to All Farm Operators in January, 1935, by States[8]

State	Total	Number of Cases Relief	 Rehabilitation	Ratio of Combined Case Load to All Farmers
United States, total	593,612	390,000	203,612	9
Oklahoma	58,310	50,100	8,210	27
Kentucky	54,045	53,500	545	19
Texas	40,939	18,000	22,939	8
Arkansas	28,098	9,100	18,998	11
South Dakota	27,733	9,800	17,933	33
Minnesota	23,842	13,200	10,642	12
Mississippi	23,260	10,900	12,360	8
North Dakota	22,633	22,600	33	27
Pennsylvania	22,573	22,200	373	12
Alabama	19,507	2,000	17,507	7
North Carolina	18,674	11,800	6,874	6
Georgia	17,894	5,500	12,394	7
South Carolina	17,579	11,500	6,079	11
Missouri	16,300	9,800	6,500	6
Tennessee	15,034	12,100	2,934	6
New Mexico	17,720	5,600	9,120	36
Illinois	14,633	13,800	833	6
Kansas	14,044	6,800	7,244	8
Colorado	13,917	7,000	6,917	22
Florida	13,107	7,400	5,707	18
Louisiana	12,910	2,200	10,710	8
Virginia	10,257	7,200	3,057	5
Michigan	10,179	8,000	2,179	5
Ohio	9,444	7,100	2,344	4
West Virginia	8,283	7,100	1,183	8
Wisconsin	8,281	6,800	1,481	4
Nebraska	8,077	5,700	2,377	6
Idaho	7,620	7,500	120	17
Montana	6,549	5,900	649	13
Iowa	6,288	5,000	1,228	3
Indiana	5,473	4,600	873	3
California	4,921	4,900	21	3
Washington	3,763	3,300	463	5
Utah	2,294	1,700	594	8
Wyoming	1,708	600	1,108	10

State	Total	Number of Cases Relief	Rehabilitation	Ratio of Combined Case Load to All Farmers
Maryland	1,700	1,700	.....	4
New York	1,697	1,600	97	1
Massachusetts	1,500	1,500	.....	4
Maine	1,254	900	354	3
Oregon	1,158	1,100	58	2
New Jersey	1,128	900	228	4
Arizona	957	800	157	5
Connecticut	564	400	54	1
Vermont	401	400	1	2
New Hampshire	213	100	113	1
Nevada	121	100	21	3
Delaware	100	100	.....	1
Rhode Island	100	100	.....	2

support dependent professions. This obvious reality opened the way to federal relief for agriculture, which began officially in July, 1932, when the Reconstruction Finance Corporation was authorized to lend $300,000,000 of federal money to states and communities for emergency relief purposes. Ten months later, with the incubation of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the United States formally entered the business of direct relief.

Prior to 1933 the great majority of all public and private relief had gone to cities. During the first nine months of 1932 it was estimated that no more than 100,000 country people were receiving public assistance. Virtually all this was under terms of state poor laws. As soon as federal funds became available, and during the final quarter of 1932, rural relief loads shot skyward to more than a million cases. The New Deal, therefore, inherited a stupendous burden of rural relief--prefabricated and ready set. Until 1935 the rural relief burden mounted rapidly to double the original inheritance and to touch a temporary high of 16 per cent of all rural families of the United States; roughly 8 per cent of all farm families. The percentage has receded slowly. Rural relief loads remain heaviest in the Appalachian regions, the Ozarks, cutover lands of the Dakotas, Nebraska, western Oklahoma, and Kansas. Rural doles, however, have ranged only in "lower brackets" of from $6 to $18 per month per family—as compared with two or three times that amount for city relief.

During most of the thirties only about 30 per cent of our people on rural relief were workers: more than 10 per cent were superannuated, 10 per cent were minors, 15 per cent were widows, and the remainder principally children, cripples, invalids, and mental defectives. About half of all rural workers on relief had at least one week's employment per month, usually as farm operators or farm laborers, as an average figure, and managed to stay off relief for three months after losing their jobs; whereas farmowners remained off relief for an average of sixteen months after losing their farms. In all these respects rural relief is more hopeful of future and more convincing of need than the average of city relief.

We have already noticed the general background of farm depression; the tripling of farm mortgage indebtedness between 1917 and 1929; the fall of crop value from $12,000,000,000 to $5,500,000,000; the sinking of farm-hand employment from 114 to 90 per hundred farms (between 1929 and 1933); and during the same years the decline of farm laborer's wages from $49 to $27 per month.

Rural depression as a whole continues more disturbing than actual depression on the farms. Miners, for example, form an increasing proportion of the rural relief load, as general mine operation stays less than half of its 1929 level. Rural building industries have tumbled. Such dominantly rural manufacturing as sawmills, pottery and clay works, stone quarries, glassworks, and remote iron and steel mills remain "depressed." During the middle thirties more than half the land area of the country was designated by the Department of Agriculture as "emergency drought areas." The silent and ruinous specter of drought and blowing dust is forever close at hand. In part-time farming areas, such as the Ozarks-Appalachian belt and the lake states cutover lands, perhaps one-fifth of the entire rural population seems to be permanently on somebody's relief roll. In regions of richer soils, such as the corn belt and the hog and dairy lands of the near West, rural relief loads can be approximated as a permanent percentage of from 3 to 6.

Rural relief in the wheat belts and the Far West generally varies drastically with annual rainfall—from less than 10 per cent in "good years" to 35 per cent or more in extreme drought years. In all farming sections rural relief demands vary considerably by month and season, rising sharply in winter, falling notably in spring, summer, and early autumn.

Nowadays there is increasing stability in general statistics of farm population. During the sixteen years between 1919 and 1935, for example, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics estimated that 28,000,000 people left farms and 20,000,000 came back to farms. During the period 1930 through 1934, the bureau estimated that 6,578,000 persons arrived at farms from nonfarm areas, but less than 2,000,000 of them were still on farms by the beginning of 1935. Similarly 7,176,000 persons left farms during the same period and only 2,593,000 failed to return. About half of all recipients of rural relief had recently moved from home lands to new locations.

There is another highly significant characteristic of present-day rural relief, an attribute marking it as a more than usually acceptable social investment. According to the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,*[4] 444 children under five years of age per thousand white women of twenty to forty-four years of age are now necessary to maintain a stationary population for the United States as a whole. Only rural America is producing a surplus population to replenish urban areas and to overcome fast-tumbling city birth rates. Socially speaking, children remain the most important of all farm crops.

On the whole, the poorest farming sections are the most prolific of children. But all farming sections, even the richest, are begetting future reservoirs of citizens. Rural birth rates are highest in the Ozarks-Appalachian belt, with 838 children of less than five years to each thousand women of twenty to forty-four. In the spring wheat belt this figure is 804; in the eastern cotton belt, 752; in the lake states cutover lands, 737; in Rocky Mountain reclaiming lands, 644. Statistically it seems inevitable that farming lands will continue to furnish youth and new blood for cities. And that is an indispensable service for which a nation can afford to pay.

For census purposes a farm is defined as having at least three acres of land or a productivity valued at $250 or more. Also, a farm is all the land directly farmed by one person, either by his labor or with the assistance of members of his household or hired employees.

This is an extremely lax definition. Even so, as we view the tangles, dead ends, and contradictions incidental to rural relief today and yesterday, the truth becomes undeniable that the commanding burden of this relief is concerned with rural support populations and with agrarian hangers-on, such as harvest workers, now-and-then farm hands, sharecroppers, ill-situated tenants, and "subsistence" or part-time farmers—ruralists who have settled on some crust of earth, usually an extremely poor one, with the rather vague hope of snatching an occasional crumb or small potato from the bounties of productive soil.

Depending on the particular area involved, this weary multitude may be defined either as the inevitable back-draws of vanished frontiers or as an agrarian dialectic from whose numbers will be drawn reserves of bona fide farmers, villagers, and industrial workers of tomorrow.

As already suggested, more than half of the entire rural relief load has been concentrated in fourteen states, which combinedly have less than one-fourth of the farms of this nation. Except in excessively poor lands or regions of intense droughts, less than a tenth of the recipients of rural relief have been farmowners. Further rural "reliefers," on the whole, have not been livestock growers. Few have had schooling or formal training in the trade of agriculture. Less than 4 per cent are high-school graduates; less than a third have completed grade school.

Miscellaneous rural relief has been molded into catalogues: emergency relief, advances under a "rehabilitation program," and employment on public works. The evolution has been in that order, on the ground that any program for the reconstruction of American agriculture must take close account of human conservation as well as conservation of natural resources, and must be permanently geared to the particular community in which the relief is attempted.

Obviously mere temporary assistance is the goal of direct relief, which can rarely be expected to yield lasting benefit. In this connection the Works Progress Administration offer a pertinent critique: "The more fundamental measures for building a superior agrarian civilization in the United States are long-time measures, not planned for immediate results. They require national co-ordination and Federal financial support. Successful rehabilitation cannot be accomplished without a continuing course of action, uninterrupted by sudden shifts of policy such as have characterized relief and rehabilitation programs during the depression years."[8]

Until a decade ago, poor country people when penniless and hungry could depend only upon neighbors, or the local poorhouse, or a possible handout of a dime or a quarter from the gentleman wearing the Chesterfield topcoat. There are no longer enough poorhouses or neighbors with bank accounts or gentlemen with unattached dimes to go around. The National Resources Board concludes that of soil that is entirely or nearly torn from 125,000,000 acres of United States land; that another 100,000,000 acres are fast undergoing erosion destruction, and that at least 35,000,000 acres are already wasted. Of grim necessity, perhaps a million farmers are today cultivating subsoil and not topsoil, which is about as satisfactory as eating corn on the cob without uppers. It is further to be repeated with deepest regret that the inauguration of the AAA has failed to prevent displacement of tenants and sharecroppers from their land; while it has given landlord the plush-lined opportunity to collect "old debts" from sharecroppers according to the prevailing, peculiar, and otherwise crooked arithmetic so long employed by the habituated plantation owner south of Mason and Dixon's line.

Meanwhile rural relief has run virtually the entire gamut of Roosevelt relief authority. When Civil Works Administration and the FERA had opened drives for direct employment of rural people, the latter agency, late in 1933, set aside special funds for "drought relief," that is, for purchase of grain, hay, and other feeds for the benefit of "drought-impoverished Westerners." The United States Bureau of Roads next established road-building projects for drought-land farmers, while the PWA assumed up to 30 per cent of costs of materials. Wages were paid for the road-building projects by the CWA.

During 1934 "drought relief" was extended to almost half of our land surface. In that year the FERA was allotted funds for relief land purchases. Relief took the form of clothes, food, household supplies and medical care, feed for livestock, seed for forage crops, and employment on the so-called work program.

Agencies co-operating with the FERA in the colossal undertaking of drought relief included: state and local relief administrations; the Emergency Conservation Work; the General Extension Service of the United States Department of Agriculture; the AAA; the Farm Credit Administration; the Farm Debt Adjustment Service; the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation, which took the livestock purchased by the AAA and had it processed for distribution among relief families.

So gigantic a kettle of alphabet soups resulted in a monumental instance of bureaucratic confusion and incompetence. In the early days of FERA, relief administrations of southern states began to make advances of so-called "capital goods"—fertilizers, seed, tools, and work animals to ruralists on relief. In April, 1934, FERA begot a Rural Rehabilitation Division to "develop this type of aid to farmers on a national scale."

For farmers living on "fertile land," a highly arbitrary and unscientific phrase, it proposed to provide such resources as seed, livestock, equipment, buildings and building repairs, and more land, if needed; to arrange debt adjustments, if necessary; and to give training and advice in farm management and home economics. Displaced farmers would be relocated on the land. Farmers living on poor land would be moved to better land purchased by a land program in which the AAA shared. Rural relief families living in towns having less than 5,000 inhabitants would be provided with subsistence garden. Selected families would be transferred from the towns to subsistence farms. All subsistence and capital goods provided under the rehabilitation program would be assigned a cash value, charged against the families' accounts, and paid for by the farmers in cash, in kind, or in the work on federal work projects.

"Though these general objectives were determined by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the program was worked out under state control. The state emergency relief administrations organized their own rural rehabilitation divisions to conduct the programs. . . . It is not surprising, therefore, that the programs in practice diverged somewhat from the original plan. Although Administration machinery was provided for organizing rehabilitation on a national scale, the program continued to be concentrated in the Southern States . . .

"The first F.E.R.A. grants specifically for rural rehabilitation, made in May, 1934, went to seven Southern states—Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia. . . . In February, 1934, fewer than 88,000 cases received advances under the rehabilitation program, and more than half of these were in the two states of Alabama and Louisiana. Ninety-three percent of the total were in the Southern states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas. Outside of the South the only states with more than 100 cases were Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, and Washington."*

At the heyday of this experiment, rural rehabilitation cases climbed to a high of approximately 400,000. The type of goods advanced to "clients" varied from area to area according to the type of farming. In cottonlands, mules and fertilizers were the usual advances; in Tennessee, fertilizers, seeds, and livestock; in Wisconsin, cows, horses, pigs, hens, seed, and implements. In Olmstead County, Minnesota, machinery loans were refinanced and in Hawkins County, Tennessee, farm mortgages were secured with the help of rehabilitation advances.

As a rule the rehabilitation agency assisted the farmer in selecting the required goods and made payment in his behalf through the Rehabilitation Corporation, the latter retaining title to durable goods and livestock.

Terms of repayment of these loans varied by states, or counties. Advances for capital goods were generally repayable over a period of three to twenty years, while repayment of advances of perishable subsistence goods was to be made within one year. Crop mortgages and personal notes were given as security. Interest rates varied with locale. In some states no interest was charged until the notes reached maturity; in others the advances were free of interest for the first year. In still others government lending agencies accepted payment in marketable produce; in drought belts, borrowers were given employment on work projects and thus were enabled to pay back part of their advances.

In June, 1935, all responsibility for the Rural Rehabilitation program was shifted from the F.E.R.A to the Resettlement Administration; taken out of the hands of the state administrations, and centralized under federal authority.

Under the regime, rehabilitation loans to farmers continued, with the Resettlement Administration providing farm management plans (somewhat academic and highly controversial) and supervision to loan clients, charging interest of 5 per cent and limiting the period of a loan to five years. The Resettlement Administration introduced direct grants for certain needy farmers. But the role of rural rehabilitation diminished rapidly during the processes of transfer and buck-passing. Meanwhile the RA became more and more a political pushball. Rather consistently, for five years, RA has lost caste and experimental importance, until its final demise.

Amounts of rural relief have varied enormously by section, and by color; viz., average monthly allowance to Negro tenants of the eastern cotton belt has been only one-half that of white tenants of the same area. State administrations, perhaps, had a rule in gauging

TABLE SHOWING AVERAGE AMOUNT OF RELIEF RECEIVED BY RURAL HOUSEHOLDS, BY USUAL OCCUPATION OF THE HEAD AND BY AREA, JUNE, 1935

(138 Counties Representing 9 Agricultural Areas)

Area	*Total*	*Owners*	*Agriculture* *Tenants*	*Croppers*	*Laborers*	*Nonagriculture*
All areas	$12	$13	$12	$ 9	$12	$15
Eastern Cotton:						
Total	9	9	10	10	8	12
White	10	10	12	10	9	14
Negro	7	9	6	9	7	10
Western Cotton:						
Total	9	9	10	9	8	9
White	9	9	10	9	8	10
Negro	8	8	9	8	7	7
Appalachian-Ozark	10	10	9	..	11	12
Lake States, Cutover	20	19	25	..	18	21
Hay and Dairy	22	20	21	..	23	23
Corn Belt	16	13	16	..	17	18
Spring Wheat	18	17	18	..	17	23
Winter Wheat	12	14	12	..	11	15
Ranching	18	18	20	..	17	16

the black man's "standard of living." But in the light of census information or reputable agricultural economics, so glaring a discrimination certainly cannot be justified.

AVERAGE TYPE AND AMOUNT OF TOTAL ADVANCES TO RURAL REHABILITATION CLIENTS, BY COLOR AND BY AREA, JUNE, 1935

(138 Counties Representing 9 Agricultural Areas)

Area	*Number of Cases*	*Average Amount of Advances*	*Advances for Capital Goods*		*Advances for Subsistence Goods*	
			Per Cent Receiving Advances	*Average Amount*	*Per Cent Receiving Advances*	*Average Amount*
All areas	14,428	$189	84.0	$168	83.1	$58
Eastern Cotton:						
Total	6,288	175	90.3	119	97.9	69
White	4.028	205	91.2	145	98.8	74
Negro	2,260	122	88.8	73	96.3	60
Western Cotton:						
Total	2,332	388	91.1	362	97.3	60
White	1,872	416	91.8	387	97.3	62
Negro	460	276	88.3	257	97.4	51
Appalachian-Ozark	904	153	92.3	133	76.5	40
Lake States, Cutover	770	104	98.7	67	38.2	100
Hay and Dairy	1,386	168	89.6	176	32.0	31
Corn Belt	1,284	116	68.2	144	62.5	28
Spring Wheat	948	31	20.5	44	94.3	24
Winter Wheat	310	187	86.5	178	87.7	39
Ranching	206	182	69.9	201	77.7	53

The money value of the advances given to clients varied from $31, the average advance in the spring wheat area, to $416 for whites in the western cotton area. Next to the western cotton area, the winter wheat and ranching areas paid the highest average advances. In terms of advances for capital goods alone, the advances only were considered, the lake states cutover area was found to have given the highest amounts, averaging $100, followed by the eastern cotton belt with $69. Moreover, the lake states cutover was the only area in which the average value of advances for subsistence goods exceeded the average value of advances for capital goods.

According to elaborate tabulations of the Works Progress Administration, a composite picture of the typical farmer on relief would show a man of about forty, married, father of three or four children, sole breadwinner for the family, a resident of his county for at least ten years. The average farm owner of the United States is a man of forty-seven. Farm laborers and tenants on relief are somewhat younger.

These statistics and others suggest rather clearly that farm labor is becoming a permanent occupation and is no longer only the first rung of the agricultural ladder. Quoting the Division of Social Research of the WPA:

"Whereas 96 percent of the owners and 95 percent of the tenants, other than sharecroppers, remained at their usual occupations under the rehabilitation program, 44 percent of the croppers climbed up the agricultural ladder, becoming tenants. . . .

"Only one percent each of croppers and other tenants on rehabilitation had gone so far up the agricultural ladder as to become owners. The percentage was higher for the farm laborers (6 percent), whereas 20 percent of the nonagricultural workers had become farm owners. Almost one-half of the farm laborers and nonagricultural workers became tenants (exclusive of croppers), however, this being the easiest way to return to the land. It is possible, of course, that some of these had carried out the shifts to tenancy before they became rehabilitation clients. This explanation would apply to those cases where nonagricultural workers returned to the open country and took up agriculture again to tide themselves over a period of unemployment."

Farm work projects have included such enterprises as the building of roads, dams, and water-conservation projects, processing of alleged surplus commodities, improvement and building of country schools, churches, and clubs. By 1936 the WPA administrator had conceded these generalities as regards public works for farmers:

a. "A works program is not well adapted to conserving agricultural assets unless it is concentrated in off-seasons or unless members of the farm families other than operators are available for employment.

"Because of efforts to operate on marginal lands, because of large families, or because of natural disaster, such as droughts or floods, farm families may badly need cash when the loan of such cash would be economically unsound. . . . Every effort should be made to provide this cash through grants to families temporarily in need, in order that farmers may remain on their farm and preserve their agricultural asset. . . .

b. "This points to the consideration that in many instances direct relief, such as Resettlement emergency grants, is most suited to the needs of the farmer. Though perhaps less calculated to preserve his self respect, such grants, nevertheless, leave him free to devote his full time to recouping his farm assets.

c. "Work projects which tend to draw farmers into towns and villages should be minimized. . . ."

Rehabilitation was set as a goal for instances of rural relief in which the family head is employable and judged capable of agricultural success. During 1935 rural cases classified as unemployable were returned to state and local care. In 1936 the Social Security program began to assume responsibility for the aged, the blind, and for dependent children. The test for accepting an applicant for rehabilitation became a matter of decision by the supervisor and a local committee as to whether he was a promising enough "risk" to be able to repay such loans as might be necessary for his return to established farming.

Since 1936 attempts at direct rural rehabilitation have steadily diminished, though government loans to farms have increased. Meanwhile hundreds of thousands of small farmers, farm laborers, and other rural citizens have been assigned to the rolls of WPA, now the all-inclusive colossus of federal relief.

The swath of rural relief diminishes. But a great social venture is begun and is by no means ended.

The venture abounds in administrative and theoretical faults. Judged most charitably, the giving of federal relief to rural America has been fantastically extravagant. Its leadership has been, and to a large measure remains, nonagrarian; the ideology and amiable daydreaming of "socially minded" city people who have packed, shipped, and sown without necessary foreknowledge of the land, its investment problems, its vagaries, or of the minds and opinions of men and women for whom farm land is essential life.

The above may be grounds for regret, but not for condemnation. The New Planners of farm relief galloped pell-mell along an untrodden path. They have fought and fumbled a way into what was fast becoming an uncharted wilderness of social despair. For decades rural poverty has been accepted smugly as a bucolic inevitable. Prior to 1933 there were no real precedents or landmarks in administration of rural rehabilitation or direct aid. From its birth the New Deal's principles and practices of rural rehabilitation had conflicted with fundamental theories of the AAA.

This fact alone is not of serious consequence. Relief expenditures of public moneys in rural America have not been vast in comparison with other billion-slinging "projects." For example, total outlays for rural rehabilitation do not approach the fantastic costs of the fantastic tide-harnessing at Passamaquoddy.

The really serious fault of federal relief for rural people has been, and remains, one of inconsistency; of rapidly changing goals, administrative changes, rapid and politically guided shiftings of responsibility; ambiguous declarations of purpose, which lead rural clients and local administrators alike into perennial furrows of confusion.

By current nature and proved history, rural rehabilitation is an issue in long-term planning, not in temporary politics. It requires an enormous amount of accurate research which was not available in 1933, and is not sufficient today. A perfect instance of this truth is contained in the Resettlement Administration's declaration of lands as "marginal" or "submarginal" without benefit of scientific soil surveys, the one essential criterion to the truth or falseness of such a classification.

At least a beginning has been made in a field of profound social importance; a field which holds possibilities of outstanding attainment during years and decades immediately before us.

COTTON ECONOMY

11

PO' FOLKS DOWN SOUTH

THE essential economy of the Old South remains an economy of cotton. It is now to be noted that North American cotton seems to be on its way out of solvency. United States cotton faces continuing collapse of indispensable foreign markets. Today other countries can, and do, raise better cotton on richer lands at lower cost per pound. Today, even in our own country, technical requirements for manufacture of cotton goods change rapidly, making a high percentage of southern poor-land cotton virtually unusable and therefore unsalable except in government warehouses, which are already crammed with older cotton. A gigantic European war now destroys cotton import credits throughout Europe and the British Isles, throws merchant fleets out of operation, engenders bitterness toward our supplies and enhances possession of cotton-growing areas beyond our boundaries.

The international geography of cotton has changed tremendously during the past half century. But for purposes of this chapter I am referring primarily to the ante-bellum cottonlands of the Southeast and West South, particularly the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and the Carolinas. According to the census, these remain the "cotton states." Within their boundaries are the enduring strongholds of cotton plantations and the far greater enumeration of incidental cotton farms upon which average cotton yields are only about 225 pounds per cultivated acre and where overhead costs for growing cotton range from 7 to 15 cents per pound.

Contrary to credos begotten by southern historical novels, large plantations are not, and never have been, the mainstay of southern agriculture. According to the most reliable records at hand, at least

70 per cent of all farmers of the ante-bellum South did not own slaves, and at least one-half of the slaveholders owned less than five slaves. The greater part of the "Old" South was a miscellany of small and far-scattered tracts of land tilled by single families. This picture is essentially true today, when hundreds of thousands of comparatively small farms, tilled by from one to four families, make up the overwhelming majority of all farms of the cotton-growing Old South.

Prior to the Civil War there were probably 30,000 plantations within the "cotton states." The census of 1910 listed the plantations (farms accommodating five or more families of tillers) as 33,903. The agricultural census of 1935 and the general census of 1940 suggest that the number of plantations remains approximately the same.

In any case, this is less than 3 per cent of the total of active farms of the cotton South today. It is further noteworthy that the distribution of plantations and their groupings remain almost identical to plantation locales of 1860: in the Atlantic Coast plain of the eastern Carolinas and east Georgia, the black belt of inland South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, the Upper Piedmont of the western Carolinas, north central Georgia and eastern Alabama, the Mississippi ridge country of eastern Mississippi, the Mississippi bluffs of the Memphis area and lower southwest Mississippi, the delta country of the lower Mississippi River basin (in the tri-state lowlands of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi); the interior plain of south central Arkansas and central Louisiana, the Red River lowlands of southwestern Arkansas and northwestern Louisiana, the Arkansas River lowlands of central Arkansas, and the Muscle Shoal basin of west central Tennessee.

To T. J. Woofster, Jr., and his associates in rural research we are indebted for the following composite picture of the average southern cotton plantation as it is today. This picture is based on "rounded averages" for 646 plantations recently surveyed:

"The typical cotton plantation includes a total of 907 acres, of which 385 are in crops, 63 idle, 162 in pasture, 214 in woods, and 81 in waste lands. Approximately 86 per cent of the 907 acres was owned by the operating landlord and 14 per cent was rented from other owners. Of the crop land harvested . . . 44 per cent was planted to cotton . . .

South Carolina is lower than that of the United States as a whole, or of any other geographic division of it. The average value of all rural dwellings in these seven cotton states is $467, whereas average value of farm dwellings in the Middle Atlantic states is $2,237; in New England, $2,218; in the East North Central, $1,559; along the Pacific Coast, $1,617; in the West North Central area, $1,559; and in the Mountain states, $989.[3]

Average values for dwellings of farm owners in the Carolinas and Georgia (South Atlantic states) is $782; in Alabama and Mississippi (East South Central) $711; in Arkansas and Louisiana (West South Central) $512. For tenant dwellings median values of farm are $374, $361, and $314 respectively. According to a survey of farm housing made in 1934 by the Bureau of Home Economics of the Department of Agriculture in co-operation with the Civil Works Administration, the overwhelming majority of farm homes in the seven cotton states are unpainted frame dwellings. In Mississippi such houses include two-thirds of all owner homes, and more than four-fifths of all tenant homes. Ninety-three per cent of Negro tenants of Louisiana lived in this type of building, as do more than a million rural families of the South.

Diet standards of cottongrowers are fully as low as housing standards. So are their standards of clothing: brogan shoes, home-made underwear (if any), cheap gingham dresses, cheap straw hats, patched overalls, "hick'ry" shirts, and no socks are the accepted rule. The Woofster survey contends that the average cotton tenant lives for eight months of the year on a cash advance averaging $13 per month, for an average tenant family of 4.4 persons. Obviously, not all this money can be spent for food. The advance must also cover emergency or habitual needs of medicine, tobacco, kerosene, and clothing. The staple foods are salt pork, flour, lard, sugar, coffee, and molasses. From firsthand interviews with storekeepers in cottonlands of Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee I gather that the sharecropper's scanty dollar is spent approximately as follows:

For food 65 cents, divided about as follows: flour, 24 cents; lard, 11 cents; meat, 10 cents; sugar, 5 cents; coffee, 3 cents; molasses, 2 cents; condiments, 2 cents; miscellaneous food products, 8 cents. Roughly 15 per cent of the sharecropper's cash or store credit goes for clothing; 4 per cent for medicine; 5 per cent for tobacco; 11 per cent for household furnishings and miscellaneous home supplies.

Recreation goods, toys, and minor luxuries are almost completely absent from the buying picture.

The tenant's spending is heaviest during summer and autumn months, about two-thirds of his total income being spent in less than one-third of the year. Storekeeper's ledgers tell that his hardest times are during winter and early spring, when roughly nine-tenths of all his available cash or store credit must go for the rough staple foods.

In terms of cotton tenure, home gardens remain a minority item, though their number increases with the exhortations of county agents and of home demonstration agents and other working arms of the Department of Agriculture. Still only a minority of cotton farmers have yet acquired the "gardenin' habit." Their home production of meat, usually pork, and milk and other animal products is seriously handicapped by scarcity of refrigeration, which means that most home-grown produce must be eaten only during the cool winter months. Traditionally landowners have not been friendly toward home gardens or home family orchards for tenants' use. Such resources are profitable to owners only in so far as they reduce the need for cash advances to tenants or croppers.

It is my own long-term observation that malnutrition is broadly characteristic of the cottongrowing rural South. During many years I have watched the physical symptoms of commonplace malnourishment—rickets, partly starved children, a preponderance of toothless or snag-toothed adults, eye infections, carbuncles, and skin sores. Time and time again in tenant homes I have watched children and adults alike gulp their scanty food like hungry wolves. Yet this subject, too, is inadequately measured by capable research. In 1937 the Mississippi Agricultural Experiment Station published a detailed study of eating habits of cotton tenants in a given county of Mississippi. Though limited in scope, the work stands as a convincing cross section of sharecropper eating habits:[4]

The survey tells that cotton farm families are, as a rule, supplied with barely enough protein and phosphorus to maintain life; that the supply of calcium is sufficient, though iron is seriously inadequate, and that vitamins present in green vegetables and fresh fruits are seriously insufficient.

Health statistics of the cottongrowing South give powerful support to this contention. Failing health of the rural South is further aggravated by infamously poor housing. Lack of screening persistently hoists the toll of deaths and illness resulting from malaria. Primitive water supply and want of disposals holds typhoid deaths in insistent and otherwise unnecessary prominence.

Poor diet is the principal cause of pellagra, a ruinous malady now almost entirely confined to poor folks down south. For the United States at large annual death rate from typhoid and paratyphoid is about 2 out of each 50,000 citizens; in the seven cotton states it is 6½. The national death rate from malaria is about 1 in 50,000; in the South it is 8. For the country at large pellagra deaths are slightly more than 1 in 50,000; in the cotton states the figure is 12½.

These figures are based only on deaths. They do not compute the tremendous losses in habitual illness or the many types of chronic invalidism which result directly from malnutrition. Further, these totals include the entire rural population of the seven cotton states; planters, farm owners and inhabitants of villages, as well as tenants and sharecroppers. It is a reasonable inference that the death rate among sharecroppers and tenants is materially higher than among the other groups. The total situation, however, is best described by the word "terrible." So long as a vast population is habitually undernourished public health campaigns are about as beneficial as the serving of meat sauce and mustard without any meat.

According to the *Southern Medical Journal,* with the single exception of North Carolina, every state of the South now shows a stubborn increase in malaria mortality. The authors of the report[*] suggest that "the depression which, in its general impoverishment and degradation of the population, has had no equal since the recognition of malaria as a public health problem in our midst, is probably the most important contributory factor."

Vital incompetence of today's cotton husbandry finds further expression in paucity of communications. For example, records of the agricultural census of 1935 show that in a great sharecropping arena such as the Red River basin (where 79 per cent of all inhabitants are cotton tenants) there was only one telephone for every 96 inhabitants, one passenger automobile for each 14, and one copy of a national magazine for each 23. In the delta belt (where 90 per cent of the entire population are sharecroppers or tenants) there was one telephone to each 68 people, one passenger car to each 13, and a national magazine to each 25. (And neither of these important tenure regions has a bookshop within its far-spread and verdant confines.)

Sharecropping tends to be an archenemy to public education. So, in general, is all the feudal husbandry of cotton. For cotton, as a crop, was begotten in ignorance. By tradition, the plantation slave was illiterate. In the year 1850 such pre-eminent cotton states as Arkansas, Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama enforced statutes which named the teaching of Negro slaves either a misdemeanor or a criminal offense. By tradition, the plantation system is one in which the landlord furnishes the brain and the tenant only the brawn. (However, after considerable personal and scholastic acquaintance with plantation proprietors and considerable study of brawn expenditures by everyday sharecroppers, I note a penetrating scarcity of both commodities.)

Assuredly a substantial part of the cotton South's failure to use land intelligently, to diversify crops, and to work directly for higher standards of food and health and housing is directly traceable to pathetic feebleness of public education in the cotton country. Ironically, abominable diet and housing, prevailing poor health, and incompetent penny-wise and dollar-foolish and long-disproved husbandry of land are foremost contributors to the incompetence of cottonland education.

The typical cotton tenant farmer of today is little schooled or entirely illiterate. He is reachable only by experiments in adult education, and only then when the landlord chooses to co-operate.

Southern schooling remains a vexatious and difficult challenge. The schools of the cotton country are preponderantly rural, and country schools throughout the United States are deplorable. But schools of the cotton states are below average. In terms of juvenile literacy, school attendance, grades completed, length of school term, teacher's salary, funds expended per pupil, and value of buildings they are at the very bottom of the national list.

Public education of the South is fronted with incessant barriers. The worst of all is a smug, careless apathy on the part of the majority population. There is also the perennial racial prejudice which requires separation of schools on a purely racial basis. Further, the actual planting, tilling, and harvesting of cotton keeps tens of thousands of school children away from schools. Tenancy causes families to make frequent moves during the school year. And it keeps the majority population so abjectly poor that the majority population ceases to give a damn.

In the seven cotton states percentages of illiteracy of rural adult population range from 10 per cent in Arkansas to 23.7 per cent in Louisiana. Probably the real percentage is considerably higher since census takers are inclined to gauge literacy merely by a citizen's ability to sign his name. (The mere ability to make a longhand signature is not compelling proof of literacy.)

School population of the cotton South continues to grow, because the population of school-age youth is heavy. Yet the country-school education today carries the white student only to or through the sixth grade (one-and-a-half years less than the average country schooling for the United States as a whole). For Negro youth rural schooling of the cotton states is three and a half years less than the skimpy national average. Recent estimates of the United States Office of Education show that average lengths of school terms in the preponderant one-teacher schools of the cotton states is 166 days per year for white children and 123 days for Negroes.[6]

During 1931-1932, a typical "depression year," average annual salaries of all rural schoolteachers of the cotton states ranged from $485 in Arkansas to $702 in North Carolina. Apparently the picture is essentially the same today, except for the salaries of Negro teachers which in the states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina now average less than $300 per year.

With teachers' salaries the lowest in the United States, teacher qualifications are correspondingly low. For example, in the state of Arkansas only 6 per cent of country schoolteachers are college graduates and only 22 per cent have ever attended college.

Where cotton is cultivated most extensively, rates of illiteracy are highest. "This makes it scarcely possible to question . . . that the density of colored population, and the dominance of cotton . . . are economically allied, and that the condition of the economic alliance status attendant upon such alliance is responsible for the illiteracy . . . Any plan looking toward an immediate amelioration of

the condition of illiteracy in these areas cannot be worthy of mature consideration unless they take into consideration . . . an improvement of the economic alliance above referred to . . ."[7]

Apropos of the above, we may note that the white man of the cotton South continues in control of the educational and political purse strings, and that when money is to be had, the palefaces take most of what is to be taken, with too little regard for proportionate populations of white and colored. The Bureau of Education[8] offers the following table of per capita expenditure for teachers' salaries by percentage of Negroes in the total population:

PERCENTAGE OF NEGROES IN TOTAL POPULATION	PER CAPITA EXPENDITURE FOR TEACHERS' SALARIES	
	White	*Negroes*
Counties under 10 percent Negro	$ 7.96	7.23
Counties 10 to 25 percent Negro	9.55	5.55
Counties 25 to 50 percent Negro	11.11	3.19
Counties 50 to 75 percent Negro	12.53	1.77
Counties 75 percent and over	22.22	1.78

Controlling publics of the cotton states remain apathetic toward public education generally and they are too often and too openly belligerent toward Negro education. To this somber plaint I add the conviction that the social outlook of the cotton states remains to too great an extent a quandary in sheer unexpurgated silliness. Stupid and childishly unreal, yet altogether connotative of muddleheaded thought and action in the cotton kingdoms is the near-fantastic panorama of the southern constabulary. Suh and ma'am, let us now behold!

The fair name of Bullthrupp has been sullied. Apparently the defamer took out for the swamps or the dense brush. In behalf of the Southland and the Anglo-Saxon race, something must be done about it . . . Something is done about it. Bloodhounds and the constabulary!

The sheriff telegraphs the warden at the state prison farm to send on the dogs. Thereupon the warden crates up the official pack and ships them punctually to the accursed county. If connections are good the hounds may arrive on the night following the night upon which the crime was committed.

The unquestionable scenters and trailers are taken to the besmirched spot and given the scent—a glove left by the defamer or a shred of his pants which caught on the sill as the villain wriggled through the window to his ignoble escape. If none of these is available, any old shoe or piece of cloth will do.

The leader of the pack, a deep-jowled canine with a cleft right ear, sniffs at the bit of evidence and howls. That is his cue. He is trained to howl long and sonorously at a minimum of provocation. On such an infamous and puzzling case as this, he probably stands and howls for half an hour. Then he commences to limber up. He places his nose close to the ground and becomes the very picture of squirming activity. Meanwhile the remainder of the pack are given a whiff of the evidence and they, too, howl.

The sheriff and his deputies stand about conversing in low, dark whispers. The countryside assembles with borrowed shotguns and pistols. The hunt is on. Wives cry for their husbands not to go on the man hunt, and mothers box their young sons' ears and send them on home and later chastise them for stealing out pappy's pistol from under the pillow.

The bloodhounds are booing and plunging and participating in embarrassing familiarities. Directly the leader swings off on the scent. The pack follows, the deputies follow. So, also, does the mob. A couple of younger dogs emit adolescent roarings and take out through the brush after a rabbit. The lankiest deputy herds back the canines, cuffs and curses them comprehensively.

Now, the constabulary believe the bloodhounds infallible, with reservations. The first scent is generally erroneous. So the first hours of the man hunt likely end at the front gate of the Baptist minister or the town's leading merchant or the WPA administrator.

This will never do. Some little snivelface makes an impious remark. The officers and assembled citizenry look extremely silly and herd the hounds back to the place of beginning.

This time the leader starts off in the opposite direction and ends up at old Dago Joe's stand down by the tracks. He rares up on the counter and smells of the nice smelly buffalo fish. The citizenry are sure they have located their man. They always knew Dago Joe wasn't the respectable kind. But, alas, the paternal hound decides that he does not relish buffalo fish and off he goes to the railroad

tracks, and there the trail ends. For at the tracks he halts and commences to bay loudly.

There can be no doubt now. The defamer of the name of Bullthrupp has hopped a freight train.

In the village the constabulary is vested in the town marshal. The probabilities are that the marshal is a slightly infirm citizen in his garrulous fifties; that he wears firemen's suspenders, gold front teeth, slaunchy spectacles, and a pearl-handled forty-four; and that he is a sustaining elder in his church. The heaviest burden of marshalship is that of ennui. He must be never-endingly pottering about in quest of human interest. The village basks in lazy amiability and dirty stories. The marshal absorbs and perpetuates the flow of scandal. As custodian of the law, he is generally around and outspoken at pie suppers, weddings, carnivals, and tent shows.

The compleat marshal has still other functions. He can loaf down at the filling station corner, direct tourists, and take in road information and road talk. He can give audience to the reflections and mechanistic philosophies in circulation over at the O.K. Garage.

Of course, his most dependable nook is beside the monkey stove in McGillicurdy's General Merchandise store. There he can help the rural lads at selecting shoes and shirts, fill in the vacant end of a checkerboard, or add to the conversational romancing about hound dogs and hunting.

Officially speaking, the town marshal has little to do. Occasionally he has opportunity to break up a crap game among the cotton pickers or to shoo off a decrepit bum or a wandering Negro who has no obvious purpose. But official action in the more spectacular cases —murder, stabbing, hanging, wife beating, and burglary—fall generally to the county sheriff and his deputies.

The old-time southern sheriff has undergone several alterations. He no longer wears the flowing black beard of the mad nineties. On the rare occasions when he goes forth to enforce the sovereign law he usually carries a shotgun loaded with buckshot instead of the long-range rifle. But most of the time the sheriff's guns and handcuffs garnish the walls of his office in the south wing of the courthouse. His most frequent mission of utility is that of dehousing worthless or nonproductive tenants. The actual labor of these removals falls to the more assiduous deputy. But the sheriff makes out the papers, offers sympathy to the ruffled landlord, and collects the fees in behalf of the county and of blindfold justice.

A sheriff cannot function as an entity. He must have his deputies and deputies include several species of the human animal. First among them is the sheriff's tough son.

We will take it that Sheriff Dogbody, of Pawsuaget County, back in the days when he was raising peaches and watermelons, begat a son named Elmer. Elmer got off to a rough start. Before he was fourteen, it was about all his father, then foreman of the grand jury, could manipulate to keep Elmer from being packed off to the reformatory for shooting at the neighbors with a cat rifle.

In the course of his sixteenth summer Elmer burglarized the wholesale grocery house. His father, then deputy collector, sensed the inexpediency of longer boarding such a reprobate of a son. Thereupon Elmer was sent to a military academy up in the alfalfa belt. But the life of a soldier appeared to have no permanent appeal for the lad. Just as his papa is getting helped up over having cornered the Democratic nomination for sheriff, there is Elmer home again.

Something has to be done about it. In Pillowville Elmer has more idle time than he has innocent diversion. There are few jobs that Elmer wants and none that want Elmer. So Sheriff-elect Dogbody sighs and selects his son for a deputy. He does not want Elmer to get in on any of the dangerous jobs. Neither does Elmer. So Elmer draws his star and six-shooters and upholds law, tests the confiscated liquor, and sees that order prevails among the Negroes in the county jailhouse.

Then there is the expeditious deputy, a silent understudy of the sheriff himself. He pulls strings, paints bridges, clinches productive bootleg deals, keeps an eye on the county poor farm, and attends to incidental executive details, the manipulation of which requires mature discretion and a weather eye. The expeditious deputy accompanies nonbelligerent prisoners to the state penitentiary and at campaign time stumps for the sheriff and on election day hands out cards and engineers votes.

But occasionally something has to be done. There may be a shooting case with embarrassing ramifications: a gun-toting bootlegger who refuses to divvy up as becomes a professional gentleman or a fighting Negro to be corralled and captured. It is for missions such as these that the sheriff keeps his daredevil deputy.

The daredevil deputy is at once the delight of rural youths and village idlers. It is generally understood that he has shown some pretty rapid gunplay during his career, that he can draw with the quickest. And when there are bad eggs to be handled he goes out to handle them.

It is highly probable that the daredevil deputy suffers from a mania of some sort. Possibly he was gassed in the World War or converted at a revival meeting.

One can hardly expect a daredevil to be without his failings. Possibly he has been known to swig generous portionings of confiscated liquor and show untimely jubilations. Or maybe he has been noticed in the company of the wrong kind of ladies. But the community agrees that he is on the whole a doggone good fellow. He makes his headquarters at Red's Chilli House. He borrows the proprietor's sweater and boots. He slicks over the counter and fries his own hamburgers. He discusses the effectiveness of soft-nosed bullets and narrates some of his harder cases to circles of rural customers and goggle-eyed high-school boys.

The daredevil deputy is the moral and intellectual equal of a boy Ku-Kluxer. In times of turmoil he is the toast of the countryside and no sprinkling of the mire of scandal can rob him of his halo of romance. Like Ichabod Crane, he is welcome wherever he chooses to tarry and while on the man hunt the daredevil deputy takes precautions to let noonday find him in close proximity of a farmer with a good table.

Invited in, he strolls back into the kitchen, gossips with the wife and puts the daughter into a flurry of gigglings. He admires the hired boy's coon dog and shows professional appreciation of the old man's prowess with a repeating shotgun. Ensconced with an admiring and attentive audience he partakes heartily of the victuals and table cheer. Having regaled himself with a good mess of squirrel and dumplings and mayhap a swallow of cordial he continues on his official way.

In professional crises the daredevil deputy seems to escape bullets with astonishing ease. On the other hand, he rarely succeeds in hitting whomever he is shooting at. So his lot is not, after all, such a gory one.

The reason for this happy generality may be that the pursued one is as full of liquor as the daredevil deputy—maybe a little fuller. I would hazard the approximation that 90 per cent of the desperate criminals captured by the constabulary of the brush were amply intoxicated at the time of their capture—that they mistook the deputy for a bird of a feather or for another bartender—and realized the mistake too late to shoot.

In the cities of the Southland the police comprises the constabulary and it is in the cities with 30,000 to 75,000 inhabitants that the constabulary can be regarded as functioning in all its glory. For here are greater gatherings of poor people, both blacks and whites, and the dunderheaded nonprosperous provide splendid official opportunities for the wielders of the night stick and the conveyers of the Police Special. Occasionally there are patrolmen sent to stroll about in the creased-pants sections of the city but as a general proposition the beer parties and brawls of the better residents proceed merrily and without hindrance. But in the hamburger districts the cop struts in all glory.

A night at the police station shows a curious pageant of the fruits of the patrolman's industriousness. First there will be the bevy of colored boys brought in by Sergeant Williams from down in Martha's alley. The dusky youths wipe away their grins when the desk sergeant sternly asks the first up to the window how much he won. On receiving a grinning answer of "about fo' bits" the legal minion reaches forth, grabs the Negro and slams him in the face with a burly fist with a "No goddam nigger's gonna laff at me!" The rest of the culprits give their names meekly, shell out the contents of their pockets, and are herded downstairs to await the mercy of the police magistrate.

The next haul is by Patrolman Thrupper, who has the beat on the west side of town where the cotton fields reach right up to the Negro quarters. He has a Negro couple, an ill-shaped yellow girl and a shiny black man. Patrolman Thrupper says nothing but gives the desk sergeant a wink, and the desk sergeant, catching on, comes out from behind the bar and begins to search the boy. He pulls several cotton bolls from sequestered pockets and holds them for the inspection of the police reporter and the loafing patrolmen. It is indeed a carnival. Meanwhile the girl looks on and presently both are taken down to spend the night with the city. Their crime is listed as 3747, for the name is too naughty to be placed on the docket.

So they come, or rather so they are brought. Petty thieves of ages ranging from seven to ninety-seven, gamblers, loiterers, and celebrators, most of them black. These are the convenient cases. The white drunk gives the custodians of law the most trouble. They are afraid, if they do not know him, to quell his tongue with a sharp crack of the night stick. The fellow may be a friend of the chief or of the sergeant. So, if need be they curse back at him and in an extreme case, providing the offender is puny and unsteady, they fight with him with bare fists until he becomes sufficiently docile to "take up."

And there are still more delicate cases, requiring greater finesse of manipulation. The besotted scion of a first family may become rambunctious and acquire the craving to kick out a restaurant sign or to shoot the night chief in the stomach. The first-strainer must, of course, be discouraged from such indiscretions but during the process of discouragement he must be handled with gloves, for the pugnacious one's family escutcheon is not to be blotched with a street fight or jail sentence.

The medium-quality white drunk sobers a bit presently, comes to a barred door, asks to call a bondsman, and goes meekly home on the arm of the champion who appears to bail him out.

There are telephone calls galore from anxious Negro wives and mothers asking headquarters' permission to come down and bail out their husbands or sons. But the answer to their queries is almost invariably an emphatic NO followed by an extensive discourse in substantiation of the theory of eternal damnation.

Foremost among the southern policeman's virtues is his occasional sense of gallantry. If the southern gentleman is too much occupied at framing elections, painting bridges, selling radios, or developing residential subdivisions to rise gallantly about every fortnight to avenge some insult heaped on the unsullied folds of southern womanhood, such an accusation cannot be heaped on the slender shoulders of the southern copper. For in him the lily-white females have a genuine protector, one to stand off the uppishness of the "nigger" and the cursings of the besotted wretch from across the railroad tracks.

The policeman can tolerate no affront to his womenfolks, or to anyone's womenfolks. The urge of gallantry may move him to drastic brutality or an outright murder. I covered the following case in Texarkana:

A Negro had been arrested on a charge of drunkenness. He was brought to the station house hilarious, bubbling over with bottled gaiety. When thrust in his cell he continued to sing and dance and jubilate. But a couple of hours later when he began to sober his songs gave way to maledictions. He strained against the bars and cast invectives at his captors or at anyone he could see in the jail corridor. Presently a patrolman brought in a neighborhood streetwalker, a habitual frequenter of the station. The Negro continued swearing, sleepily, docilely. The patrolman took furious affront. He grabbed out his night stick, borrowed keys, and bent upon vengeance, opened the door and proceeded to avenge. The Negro sank to the floor senseless. An hour or so later he waked and called for water. He went unheard. The turnkey was occupied with a game of cooncan. On hearing the Negro's appeal another of the prisoners called for the turnkey. The jailer brought a mug of water but paid no attention to the Negro's complaint of a hurting about the head. By morning the victim's moans were more disconcerting. Annoyed by the mournful noises the turnkey called the Black Maria and had him hauled to the general hospital. There it was found that the Negro had suffered a fractured skull during the process of the beating. Half an hour later he died. His slayer was temporarily suspended from the force. Now he is back, and in good standing.

The business of being a small-city policeman proves increasingly profitable. The Southland's coppers have almost unmolested picking. True, they do arrest bootleggers frequently enough. But these are but the nondescript retailers, shoeshiners, black boys of the hotels, barbershop janitors, and down-and-outers who barter liquor by the pint and quart. But the stalwart policeman can superintend the bigger deals, concentrate on the wholesale trade. It is from this that he gets his money. He acquires his reputation for being an enforcer of the local-option law from his imposing total of arrests among the petty retail traders. The chief smiles and fondles his

palms and the copper welcomes co-operation from the brethren of the constabulary.

Thus the defenders of the downtrodden go happily on. The sheriffs build big houses and the police chiefs bigger ones. Then they buy cotton farms and promptly go broke.

Race prejudice, fantasies, and folklore of aristocracy or "first families," are eternal southern contradictions. There are many others. I say this, having just finished a 2,500-mile trek through Arkansas, Mississippi, northern Louisiana, and middle Alabama, a far-flung stronghold of the master monarch, Cotton. It was 2,500 miles of strange noonday stillness, well-kept fields, and eye-teasing contradictions.

About ten years earlier I made a toilsome way through much of the same country along rutted dirt roads possessed of mudholes wherein man and mule or man and Ford had been known to sink out of sight. Now we skim through King Cotton's realm on paved highways, virtually all of them completed during the past ten years, magnificent surfaced roads linked with mammoth new bridges, the peer of any in the land. We passed scores of new schoolhouses, modern and attractive and fireproof country schools with mown lawns and running water and abundant windows. We saw a countryside of bountiful harvests and apparent happiness.

Home gardens become more numerous. One sharecropper to whom as a Red Cross worker I had brought repeated doles of salt pork and canned vegetables showed me his new livestock—two Jersey cows and a registered Duroc sow with a fast-expanding progeny of seven pigs. He then showed me his garden plot, half an acre well planted, well tilled, and ready for a late harvest. Overlooking our extremely mild protests he loaded my car with garden truck, all products of that productive half acre. Then he crammed a man-sized pipe with home-grown tobacco leaves and soliloquized:

"There's eatables in the cotton country now, mister: garden truck enough already to feed hungry people. It ain't worth nothin' in money. But it does tell one thing. Them Northerners and Easterners won't have to feed the cotton folks next winter."

CHAPTER VIII

THE COTTON ECONOMY

It is possible that some varieties of each of the eight basic types of agriculture practiced in America exist in the South.[1] Extensive mechanized one crop farming, well typified by wheat growing, can be found in southern rice culture. The market garden with its highly intensive horticulture of the hand and knee type with occasionally a foreman bossing a gang of Mexicans weeding onions can be found along the Gulf from the Rio Grande Valley to Florida and along the Atlantic from Florida to Norfolk. Sheep and cattle ranches with saddle supervision of a bunch of cowboys raising stock still remain in our Southwest. The all-around animal farm with corn for hogs, hay for kine, and milk, butter, and cheese for the cities is more likely to be found in the Corn Belt or in Wisconsin than in the South. What Smith calls "The independent kingdom of my own," self-sufficing farming where the farmer and his sons grow all possible products for home use, is to be found at its lower backwoods levels in the Southern Highlands. The all-around diversified farmer with a fair balance between meat and plant products, food and cash crops, is still comparatively rare in the South. In an unmechanized but coördinated large scale farming by directed labor gangs the South offers a unique type for America in its sugar plantations of Louisiana. But small scale unmechanized farms devoted to a cash staple and loosely held together by the supervision of landlords and suppliers of credit furnish the one type of agriculture best known throughout the South. A sequel of the old plantation, this form of agriculture is now applied to tobacco and cotton. All these types of southern farming except cotton will receive consideration in later chapters.

After passing through a series of changes and adaptations in its equilibrium of plants and animals each natural region finally

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[1] Huntington and Williams, *Business Geography*, p. 340. J. R. Smith, *North America*, pp. 301-2.

settles down to a crop system more or less standardized for the area. The adoption of a region's crop system is due to many factors already suggested such as qualities of the soil and the climate's relation to the optimum conditions of growth for plants and animals. The distribution of insect pests, parasites, fungi, rusts, blights, scourges, etc., has also been pointed out as somewhat incidental to climate. Transportation, the location and character of markets, are obviously important economic factors. A factor in introducing and perpetuating a crop system that the human geographer has found to be especially important is the cultural habits of farmers. Entering a new region, farmers first attempt to reproduce the crop systems of the old country; having worked out an adaptation to the area, they hand down agricultural technique, tools, and organization. To such an extent is this true that it has been maintained in many instances that culture in the anthropological sense conditions the choice of crops and of areas for settlement. The English, for example, first planted wheat and root crops in the United States; the Germans introduced intensive farming in Pennsylvania; Italians habitually set out vineyards, and plant both trees and crops in a single field; Scandinavians go in for dairying; and Mexicans prefer cattle ranching.[2] Russians from the lower Volga Basin introduced dry farming in the Columbia Basin. We shall need to recall these facts when we come to consider the plantation and the heritage of cotton culture.

Southern Agriculture Against the National Background

To obtain a clear perspective of the agriculture of the South one must view it as projected against the trends of the nation and of the times.[3] From 1920 to 1925 agriculture began a downward movement which the period 1925 to 1932 showed no evidence of checking. Farmers compose some 27 per cent of the nation's population but today receive a little over seven per cent of the national income. From 1920 to 1925 their average return on investment was 1.7 per cent; in 1920-21 the average farm operator suffered actual loss. Expressed in returns on investment the American farmer of all our classes seems to be in business for his health. During this same period the average farmer's income from labor and management varied from $412 to $804 but this included the value of food, fuel, and shelter supplied by the farm. After these are deducted the average farmer in the best year had $170 available. In leaner years he had literally less than nothing.

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[2] See Huntington and Williams, *op. cit.*

[3] The National Industrial Conference Board has made a valuable analysis in its *Condition of Agriculture in the United States and Measures for Its Improvement.* See Evans Clark in New York *Times*, Jan. 2, 1927, whose analysis is here followed.

To suggestions that he sell and get out from under, it can be replied that values of farms shrunk thirty per cent, losing twenty billion dollars in six years. Increasing bankruptcies, indebtedness, and bank failures in farming areas have reflected these trends. From 1921 to 1925 there were chalked up a total of 21,000 farm failures increasing the rate from 20 per 100,000 farms in the ten years before 1920 to between 93 and 123 since then. When one realizes how unusual it is for a farm to go into bankruptcy, the figures assume new significance for an era in which no increases in business failures occurred. Between 1890 and 1910 the burden of mortgaged debt on American farms did not increase faster than their value. From 1910 to 1920 the value of farm property rose 90 per cent while the mortgaged debt rose 217 per cent. It is estimated that, in 1890, 20 per cent of the farms were under mortgage, in 1920, 40 per cent, while in 1926 the indebtedness reached $8,500,000 covering 42 per cent of the value of property involved. That it rose no higher must in part be attributed to an increasing disinclination of capital to accept farms as financial risks. The personal indebtedness of American farmers rose from $1,000,000,000 in 1909-10 to $3,250,000,000 in 1924-25, accounting for an interest charge estimated to range from $70,000,000 to $112,000,000 annually. The records for 1925-26 of 433 bank failures in the Middle West and 312 in the South to only 18 for the Industrial East reflect the post-war deflation of agriculture. "At the close of 1925, the best year the farmer had had since 1920, the labor earnings of the average farm owner were $573—less than the value of the food, fuel, and rent enjoyed by the average farmer, a little more than the wages paid to hired labor without board, and less than half the average labor earnings of workers in other occupations." Accompanied by widespread drought and financial depression these tendencies have not slacked in downward trends.

Against this background of national agriculture we may project the cotton economy of the South. The South's farm problem resembles the nation's in that both have seen agricultural production

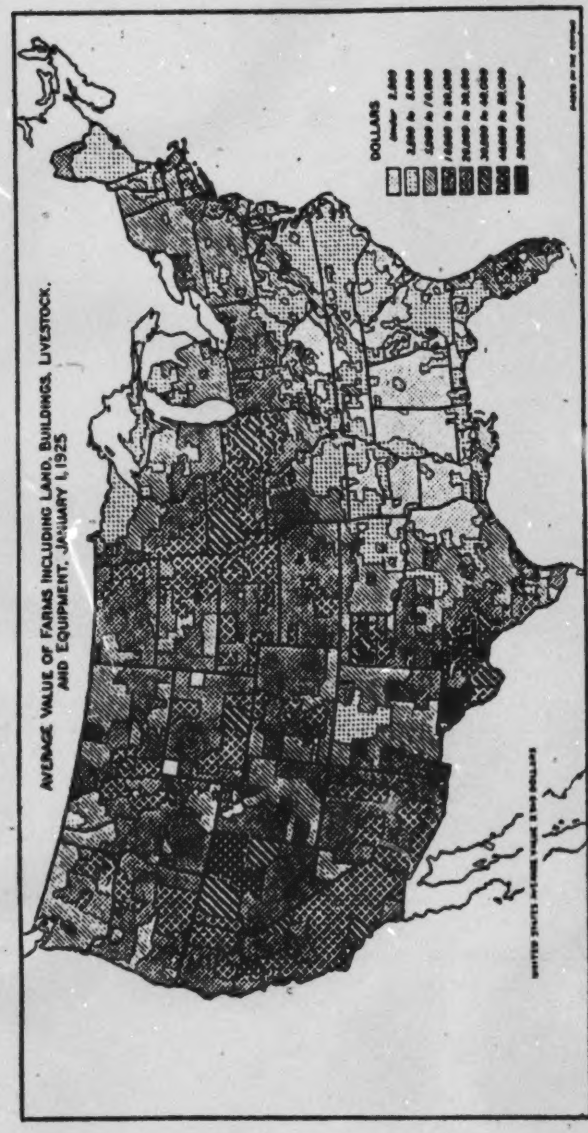
AVERAGE VALUE OF FARMS INCLUDING LAND, BUILDINGS, LIVESTOCK, AND EQUIPMENT, JANUARY 1, 1925
DOLLARS

FIGURE 11.—The total value of any farm is a combination of many factors, as per-acre value, number of acres, value of buildings, number and kind of livestock, equipment, and other items. Hence a high valuation of farm property may arise from a few acres of very high-priced land, as in certain sections of California, or from a large holding of cheap land, with considerable livestock, as in parts of the Rocky Mountain region. The average total value of an Iowa farm (land, buildings, livestock, and equipment) on January 1, 1925, was $26,240, and of a California farm $25,107. Similar figures for the several census divisions range from $2,881 in the east South Central to $18,686 in the Pacific States. (Courtesy of U. S. Department of Agriculture).

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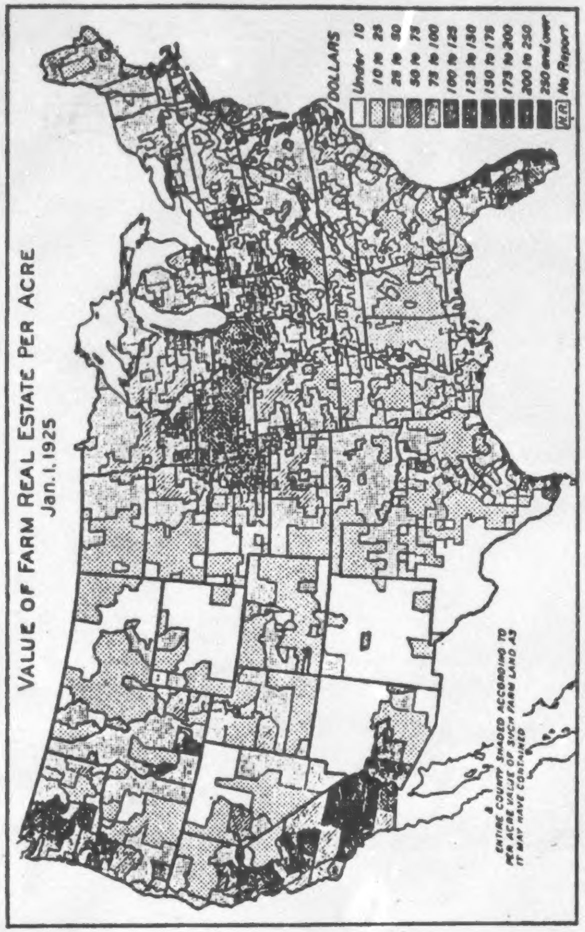

FIGURE 12.—The Corn Belt, California, and certain States on the Atlantic coast are conspicuous for their high average value per acre of farm real estate. There is great variation within practically every State, many of the Western States having small districts of highly valued irrigated land. Note the low values per acre of several of the Rocky Mountain States in comparison with high average value of farms for the same States as indicated in Figure 11. In the Cotton Belt, on the other hand, the value, both per acre and per farm, is small, but it should be recalled that many of the farms, as classified by the census, are the small holdings of croppers on plantations. (Courtesy of U. S. Department of Agriculture).

overdeveloped. In many other respects the South's agriculture presents a distinctive complex of its own. Clarence Heer's authoritative study of *Income and Wages in the South* contrasts the ten states most often regarded as characteristically southern with the rest of the nation. Over a period of some thirty years southern agriculture has furnished its farmers just over half the per capita returns received by farmers in the rest of the nation. In 1927 this ratio was 50.7 per cent; in 1924, 50.1. In periods of agricultural prosperity the South's percentage was a little higher, being 56.2 per cent in 1899, 53.4 per cent in 1909, and 55.3 per cent in 1919.[4]

It is these abnormally depressed rates of income that the student of southern agriculture must seek to explain. The most obvious explanation has to do with the size of farms. When the averages of thirteen southern states are compared with national averages for 1925, the southern farms are found to be 71.6 per cent as large with only 63.1 per cent of the crop acreage of the average farm of the nation and only 67.2 per cent of the pasture acreage. Table XIII points out these differences.

As might be expected values per farm are inclined toward an even lower level. The Southern farm was worth, in 1925, 46.4 per

TABLE XIII

FARM AREAS IN THE SOUTH, 1925 AGRICULTURAL CENSUS

STATES	Number of Farms	Land in Farms 1,000 Acres	Size of Average Farms in Acres	1,000 Acres in Crop Land	Crop Acres Average per Farm	1,000 Acres in Pasture	Average per Farm
1. Virginia	193,723	17,210	88.8	5,368	27.7	5,284	27.3
2. Kentucky	258,524	19,913	77.0	6,827	26.4	7,746	30.0
3. North Carolina	283,482	18,593	65.6	6,856	24.1	2,817	9.9
4. Tennessee	252,669	17,901	70.8	7,588	30.0	4,697	18.6
5. South Carolina	172,767	10,638	61.6	5,035	29.1	1,637	9.5
6. Georgia	249,095	21,945	88.1	10,695	42.9	3,848	15.5
7. Florida	59,217	5,864	99.0	2,022	34.1	1,489	25.1
8. Alabama	237,631	16,739	70.4	7,691	32.4	3,544	14.9
9. Mississippi	257,228	16,053	62.4	6,708	26.1	4,291	16.7
10. Arkansas	221,991	15,632	70.4	7,323	33.0	3,064	13.8
11. Louisiana	132,450	8,837	66.7	4,279	32.3	1,709	12.9
12. Oklahoma	197,218	30,868	156.5	15,837	80.3	13,015	66.0
13. Texas	465,646	109,674	235.5	29,368	63.8	75,067	161.2
South	2,981,651	309,872	103.92	115,606	38.77	128,216	43.00
Nation	6,371,640	924,319	145.1	391,459	61.44	407,935	64.02
South's Percentage	46.8	33.5	71.6	29.57	63.1	31.4	67.2

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[4] Clarence Heer, *Income and Wages in the South*, pp. 12-22.

cent of the national average, its buildings came to 41.6 per cent of the national average for farm buildings, its implements were worth 41.9 per cent, and its live stock 46.8 per cent of those on the nation's average farm. As an evidence of the part played by the smaller sizes of farms, the value of land per acre in the South was 67.6 per cent of the nation's average, the region's highest comparative figure.

TABLE XIV

FARM VALUES IN THE SOUTH, 1925 AGRICULTURAL CENSUS
(Total Values in Millions of Dollars)

STATES	Number of Farms	Total Value	Average Per Farm	Value of Land	Value Land Per Acre	Value of Buildings	Per Farm	Value of Implements Machinery	Per Farm	Value of Live Stock	Per Farm
1. Virginia......	193,723	$999.4	$5,159	$600.6	$34.90	$286.1	$1,477	$40.0	$20.65	$72.6	$37.49
2. Kentucky.....	258,524	963.5	3,727	616.2	30.95	231.2	894	30.6	11.84	85.5	33.08
3. North Carolina	283,482	1,050.0	3,704	686.4	36.92	239.6	845	46.4	16.38	77.5	27.36
4. Tennessee.....	352,669	883.6	3,497	555.9	31.06	203.4	805	40.7	16.13	83.4	33.04
5. South Carolina	172,767	523.0	3,028	247.0	32.62	110.5	639	23.1	13.37	42.3	24.52
6. Georgia.......	249,095	686.6	2,757	433.6	19.76	153.9	617	26.9	10.85	72.1	28.96
7. Florida.......	59,217	513.8	8,678	415.8	70.91	63.0	1,065	14.5	244.92	20.4	34.51
8. Alabama.....	237,631	500.7	2,107	308.6	18.44	106.1	446	23.8	10.04	62.0	26.01
9. Mississippi....	257,228	550.5	2.140	347.0	21.62	112.1	435	28.3	11.01	63.1	24.54
10. Arkansas.....	221,991	628.8	2,833	420.7	26.91	119.9	540	31.2	14.05	56.8	25.61
11. Louisiana.....	132,450	385.9	2,914	251.7	28.49	72.9	550	21.3	16.11	39.8	30.12
12. Oklahoma....	197,218	210.1	6,736	879.3	28.49	169.4	859	58.3	29.60	102.9	52.23
13. Texas........	465,646	471.8	7,436	2,625.1	23.94	420.1	902	141.8	30.47	284.6	61.10
South.......	2,981,651	$12,375.7	$4,150	$8,488.5	$27.59	$ 2,288.7	$ 767	$527.4	$17.69	1,063.7	$35.68
Nation......	6,371,640	$57,017.7	$8,949	$37,721.0	$40.81	$11,746.6	$1,843	2,691.7	42.25	4,858.3	76.25
South's Percentage.	46.8	21.7	46.4	22.5	67.6	19.5	41.6	19.6	41.9	21.9	46.8

When the inquiry is shifted to incomes from farm production the story remains the same. The study of the five year average from 1924 through 1928 shows the average southern farm to have a cash income amounting to 63.7 per cent and a gross income of 68.5 per cent of the national averages. On incomes from crops the South shows up much better with about 97.6 per cent of the national average. Where the region loses, as has been pointed out, is in the low ratios of live stock production per farm, only 38.6 per cent of the national average.

The South is facing agricultural difficulties which represent one phase of the nation's agricultural problem. This complex includes

TABLE XV

CASH AND GROSS INCOMES FROM FARM PRODUCTION, AVERAGE, 1924-1928

STATES	CASH INCOME				GROSS* INCOME			
	Crops $1000	Livestock $1000	Combined $1000	Average Per Farm	Crops $1000	Livestock $1000	Combined $1000	Average Per Farm
1. Virginia........	$103,244	$47,470	$150,714	$ 770.99	$131,373	$82,435	$213,808	$1,103.68
2. Kentucky......	91,625	67,936	159,561	611.20	118,675	113,479	232,154	898.00
3. North Carolina.	256,403	29,692	286,096	1,009.22	295,587	77,996	372,583	1,314.31
4. Tennessee.....	107,322	51,011	158,333	626.64	137,045	95,426	232,472	920.07
5. South Carolina.	121,619	10,481	132,100	764.61	142,732	37,005	179,737	1,040.34
6. Georgia.......	175,692	27,298	202,990	814.91	207,842	75,834	283,675	1,138.82
7. Florida........	88,026	15,494	103,520	1,784.15	93,769	22,073	115,842	1,956.23
8. Alabama......	158,275	18,371	176,646	743.36	186,706	57,934	244,640	1,029.50
9. Mississippi.....	191,947	23,051	214,998	853.83	214,484	53,436	268,020	1,127.88
10. Arkansas......	160,716	26,622	187,338	843.90	183,614	59,396	243,010	1,094.68
11. Louisiana......	124,055	16,347	140,402	1,060.04	134,609	32,467	167,076	1,261.43
12. Oklahoma.....	227,179	71,802	298,981	1,515.99	240,298	109,139	349,436	1,771.83
13. Texas.........	596,299	148,896	746,197	1,602.03	623,128	225,343	848,472	1,822.14
The South.........	$2,402,402	$554,471	$2,957,876	....	$2,709,962	$1,041,963	$3,750,925	....
South's Average per Farm......	$805.73	$185.96	....	$992.03	$908.87	$349.45	....	$1,258.00
The Nation........	$5,261,368	$4,659,288	$9,920,656	....	$5,928,638	$5,770,544	$11,699,192	....
Nation's Average per Farm......	$825.73	$731.25	....	$1,557.00	$930.48	$905.66	....	$1,836.14
South's Percentage .	97.6	25.4	....	63.7	97.7	38.6	....	68.5

*Gross Income includes cash income plus values of materials consumed on the farm.

low prices on agricultural products, increase of mortgage debt and of tenancy, drift of population to the cities—especially of the young and vigorous—and depletion of soil fertility.

Conditions of the Southeast favorable to agriculture include a long growing season, adequate rainfall, fertile soils or soils highly productive if adequately fertilized, nearly flat or gently rolling land, nearness to markets, good transportation facilities, and low land values. These advantages have not been adequately utilized on account of the one crop system, small acreage per farm, absentee ownership, prevalence of tenancy, drift of population from the land, abandonment of farms, impoverishment of the soil, shortage of local food crops, lack of self-sustaining farms, inadequate marketing facilities for diversified agriculture, and unattractive rural environment. Plenty of advice and information are available to enable the remedying of these defects, but it is difficult under existing conditions for the advice to be followed. The habits and knowledge of those actually on the land, the existing credit policies, and the lack of organized markets handicap change.[5]

Cotton and the Plantation

Adapted to a great variety of plant life, the South has curiously enough come to be dominated by the cotton plant.[6] With all its economic, political, and social ramifications, the fact has basic foundations in the geography of a wide area.

The limits of the Cotton Belt are drawn by lines of temperature and rainfall. On the north it follows the summer average temperature of 77 degrees; on the south the belt has its bounds set along the Gulf and Atlantic Coast by an average rainfall limit of over 10 inches during the autumn. Beyond the northern temperature boundary the growing season is too short; below the southern limits the picking season is likely to be ruined by rains. Cotton production is found throughout the southern states extending from eastern North Carolina to western Texas. The Belt is 1,600 miles long and varies from 125 to 500 miles in width, the average width being 300 miles. In an area of 295,000,000 acres, less than 3 per cent of the world's land area, is grown about 55 per cent of the world's cotton.[7] Within the boundaries set by climate the density of cotton production varies according to soil areas, factors of technology, and economic organization.

> Natural and economic forces have made the South peculiarly dependent upon cotton. Cotton may be grown only under certain climatic conditions which restrict its production in the United States to the southern states, whereas grain and forage crops which are grown to some extent in these states are grown in other parts of the United States under climatic conditions as favorable or even more favorable for their production. Since cotton will grow on practically all well-drained soils, is drought resistant, and yields well on light sandy soils to which fertilizers have been applied it is better suited to many of the soils of the South than are other staple crops. Furthermore, the South has a denser agricultural population and cheaper labor than other parts of the United States, both of which circumstances favor the production of cotton as it requires a large amount of hand labor and yields high returns per acre.[8]

Cotton occupied some 42 per cent of the crop land in the Cotton Belt in 1920 and produced a value equal to the combined value of all other crops in the Belt. The value of cotton lint is exceeded by the values of corn, hog, and wheat crops for the whole United States but, when the value of cotton seed is included, cotton usually ranks second only to corn. Cotton and "cawn" are supposed to divide the South between them but in the ten cotton states cotton occupies some 44.5 million acres to 25.6 for corn. Only North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia have larger acreages planted to corn. In our export trade cotton's value exceeds that of any other agricultural commodity. It is the chief source of income to a large proportion of southern farmers and as a matter of course occupies the best land in the Belt and determines the time devoted to other crops.

Historically cotton fastened its hold upon the South through the plantation. The plantation made its appearance in America before either cotton or slavery. The first southern colonies were called plantations and the promoters expected no doubt that the returns of their venture would come from some sort of adaptation of feudal land tenure to America. The first organizations of labor in agriculture worthy of the term plantation included indentured servants and was applied to the growing of tobacco. Well known as it is in the tropics, the plantation would in the course of time have given way to a frontier yeomanry had it not been for the fortuitous introduction of the Negro slave and the cotton plant. The plantation according to Phillips has demanded four factors: land, fertile, plentiful and level; a labor supply, docile and of low status; management involving social as well as economic supervision; and a staple crop. In the South it has found five staples: tobacco, rice, indigo, sugar, and cotton, but cotton has outdistanced them all. Cotton early commanded an enviable place in the world's commerce. It also fitted into a regular and easily supervised routine of tasks to be accomplished by plow gangs, hoe gangs, and picking gangs, in all of which, except the plowing, women and children could participate. Technology came to the plantation's aid when the system seemed about to wane, and the invention of the cotton gin insured on the one hand cheap fabrics, on the other the extension of the cotton kingdom and the perpetuation of slavery.

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[5] The case of southern agriculture has been well summed up in the "Report of Special Advisors on Reclamation and Rural Development in the South." *House Document* No. 765, Part I, 1927, p. 5.

[6] Much of the documentation on which this chapter is based will be found in the author's *Human Factors in Cotton Culture.*

[7] O. E. Baker, *Economic Geography*, III, 65.

[8] O. C. Stine and O. E. Baker, *Atlas of American Agriculture*, Part V, Section A, "Cotton," 1918, p. 11.

How the plantation contended with the frontier and how it made an aristocracy, America's first, out of part of that frontier has been recounted. How the plantation, staggered by the shock of the abolition of slavery, after a brief hiatus reorganized its labor into a tenancy and share cropping system is more important for our chronicle. A stricken upper class possessing nothing but lands met a servile population possessed of nought except the labor of their hands. In what must have been an era of primitive barter, a system was arrived at whereby labor was secured without money wages and land without money rent. Up and down the Cotton Belt southern states after 1865 vied with one another in passing crop lien laws. Accepted as the temporary salvation of a wrecked economic structure, the system has increasingly set the mode for southern agriculture. Under the crop lien system the unpropertied farmer mortgages his ungrown crop for the supplies necessary to grow it. He also pledges a portion, third, fourth, or half of his crop, for use of the land. The most outstanding commentary one can make on the South is to point out the fact that from that day to this the percentage of those who must secure their year's livelihood by crop liens has steadily increased. Many of the enfeebled aristocracy saw their once proud acres go on the block for ridiculously low prices; but the hopes for the rise of a vigorous yeomanry to take their places never materialized. The crop lien system was developed to readjust the Negro to cotton production on terms more fitting a modern economy than slavery. Its success was so great as to be disastrous. Congregated on its original fringes, the unpropertied poor white farmers poured into the new scheme and helped to make temporary expediency a permanent arrangement. Southern states which possessed a rate of 30 per cent tenancy in 1880 now rank over 50 per cent, while long since the whites have come to produce the majority of the crop. The Census of 1900 showed that of all farmers to whom cotton offered the chief source of income 67.7 per cent were tenants. In 1910, although Negro farmers cultivated 52 per cent of the total cotton acreage, the white farmers produced 67 per cent of the total crop. In ten chief cotton states in 1920, 55 out of every hundred

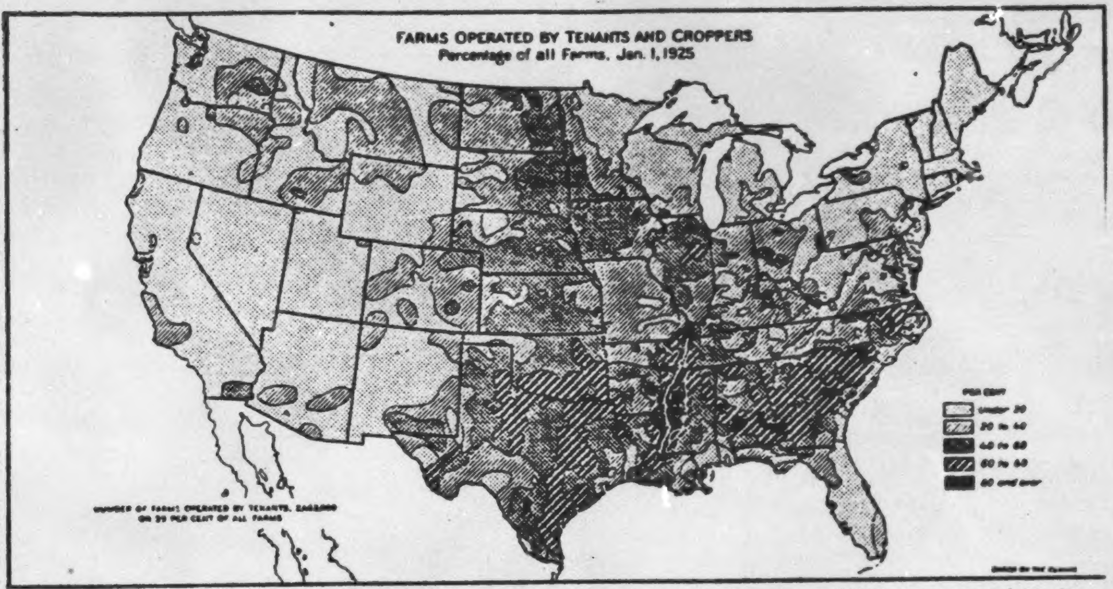
FARMS OPERATED BY TENANTS AND CROPPERS
Percentage of all Farms, Jan. 1, 1925
PER CENT
Under 20
20 to 40
40 to 60
60 to 80
80 and over

FIGURE 13.—Including cropper-operated farms with tenant farms, the percentage of all farms that are tenant-operated is high throughout most of the Cotton Belt and is highest on the most productive lands, notably in the alluvial districts along the Mississippi River. Outside the Cotton Belt the percentage is high only on the best land of the Corn Belt and in the moister portions of the wheat regions. It is low in the long-settled Northeastern States, in the Lakes States, and in the far West. Dairying, fruit and vegetable growing, and livestock ranching are less adapted to tenancy than cotton, corn, and wheat production, partly because of the greater investment, the greater technical skill, or greater permanence of tenure required of the farm operator. (Courtesy of U. S. Department of Agriculture).

THE COTTON ECONOMY

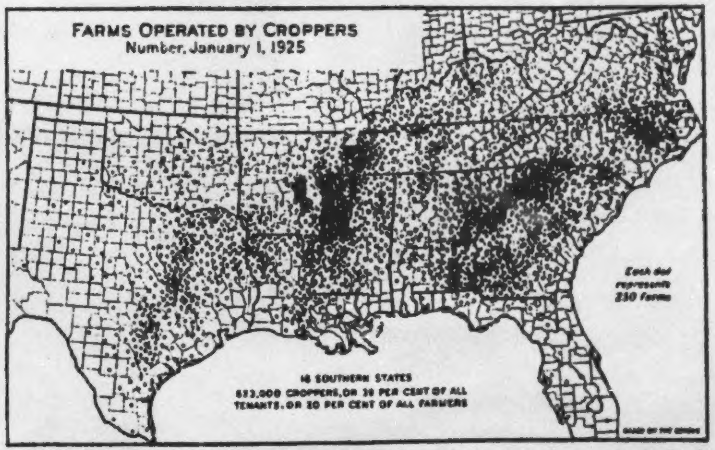
FARMS OPERATED BY CROPPERS
Number, January 1, 1925
Each dot represents 250 farms
16 SOUTHERN STATES
623,000 CROPPERS, OR 39 PER CENT OF ALL TENANTS, OR 20 PER CENT OF ALL FARMERS

FIGURE 14.—This map shows croppers separately from other tenants. Croppers in the South generally grow cotton or tobacco for a share of the crop. They use work stock furnished by their landlords, they themselves owning little or no equipment, and in many States are by law classed as laborers and not as tenants. The territory of greatest density is in the Yazoo (Miss.) Delta, which is nearly all tillable and is largely devoted to cotton production. In parts of the old Cotton Belt, notably in South Carolina and Georgia, croppers have increased recently, because many renters lost so much that they could not furnish work animals and equipment with which to farm. Most of the croppers in Kentucky and Virginia grow tobacco. (Courtesy of U. S. Department of Agriculture).

farmers were tenants; and, out of every hundred tenants, 21 were cash renters, 37 were croppers, and 42 were share tenants. By 1925, 57.7 per cent of the farmers were tenants. The number of cash tenants among the renters had fallen to 11.2 per cent while the croppers had risen to 48.7 per cent. In 1930 the percentage of tenancy for these states was 61.5. Out of every 100 tenants there were 45 croppers, 42.3 share and other tenants, and 12.7 cash renters. Table XVI shows the distribution by states and races with the addition of the non-cotton states of Virginia, Kentucky, and Florida.

The following biased interpretation of the function served by the crop lien shows the point of view of the tenant:

> When the landlord's lien law was passed every acre of agricultural land in North Carolina was immediately multiplied in value from three to ten times its actual market money value.
>
> The landlord's lien law was originally introduced for the purpose of keeping the Negro in slavery. It not only accomplished its purpose in large measure but it has gradually made slaves of an increasing number of white people.
>
> Viewed from one angle, the landlord's lien law has created and sustained a landed gentry, getting their income out of the labor of others . . . an income entirely disproportionate to the value of the crops produced if any reasonable allowance is made for the labor of men, women and children going to make the crop.[9]

It is doubtful that such a view will sustain economic analysis. A. E. Cance holds that the system of tenancy in the South merely gives a fictitious dignity to a low grade of unskilled farm laborers who would under other forms of agriculture be engaged as hired men. Southern courts have held that cropper farming is a method of paying wages in produce rather than a form of tenancy. Cance has said:

> Tenancy attracts many farm operators who otherwise would not be engaged in farming at all. The tenant has no expenses of upkeep of land or buildings. With some notable exceptions he spends little or no time improving the farmstead or making it attractive. Rented farms left to the care of tenants are almost sure to "run down" in buildings, fences, ditches, lawns, roadsides and shrubbery if not in soil, for the period of

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[9] F. M. Shannonhouse, letter in *Charlotte Observer*, March 26, 1922.

TABLE XVI

FARMS IN THE SOUTH BY COLOR AND TENURE OF OPERATORS, 1930

	In Thousands						Percentage of Total Tenancy by States			
	All Farms	Owners and Managers	Tenants			Share & other tenants	1910	1920	1925	1930
			Total	Cash	Croppers					
Virginia							26.5	25.6	25.2	28.1
White	130.9	98.1	32.8	5.5	10.4	16.8				
Colored	39.6	24.5	15.1	1.7	6.7	6.5				
Kentucky							33.9	33.4	32.0	35.9
White	237.3	53.8	83.5	8.7	27.1	47.6				
Colored	9.1	4.2	4.9	.1	3.1	1.6				
North Carolina							42.3	43.5	45.2	49.2
White	202.8	122.4	80.4	6.6	34.2	39.4				
Colored	76.8	19.7	57.1	2.5	34.8	19.7				
Tennessee							41.1	41.1	41.0	46.2
White	210.5	124.3	86.2	9.3	33.7	43.1				
Colored	35.1	7.9	27.2	2.8	16.5	7.8				
South Carolina							63.0	64.5	65.1	65.1
White	80.5	39.1	41.4	6.5	17.8	17.0				
Colored	77.4	16.1	61.3	11.7	31.0	18.5				
Georgia							65.6	66.6	63.8	68.2
White	168.8	70.1	98.7	17.0	51.4	30.3				
Colored	86.7	11.1	75.6	10.5	49.4	15.6				
Florida							26.7	25.3	21.3	28.4
White	47.9	36.5	11.4	4.6	3.4	3.2				
Colored	11.0	5.7	5.3	2.4	1.4	1.4				
Alabama							60.2	57.9	60.7	64.7
White	163.5	75.0	88.5	16.6	37.5	34.3				
Colored	93.8	16.0	77.8	32.0	27.5	18.2				
Mississippi							66.1	66.1	68.3	72.2
White	129.7	64.3	65.4	8.7	32.3	24.3				
Colored	182.8	22.7	160.1	18.3	102.9	38.8				
Louisiana							55.3	57.1	60.1	66.6
White	87.6	43.3	44.3	6.1	17.2	20.9				
Colored	73.3	10.5	63.2	6.6	32.2	24.3				
Arkansas							50.0	51.3	56.7	63.0
White	162.7	78.2	84.5	8.8	29.5	46.1				
Colored	79.5	11.4	68.1	6.1	45.4	16.5				
Oklahoma							54.8	51.0	58.6	61.5
White	180.9	70.2	110.7	16.5	16.4	77.7				
Colored	22.9	8.4	14.5	1.0	4.5	8.9				
Texas							52.6	53.3	60.4	60.9
White	409.4	173.1	236.3	15.4	68.8	151.9				
Colored	86.0	19.7	65.3	1.3	36.2	27.6				
South										
White	2,213.2	1,149.5	1,064.7	131.1	380.4	553.4				
Colored	875.2	179.1	696.1	97.9	392.3	206.4				
South										
Total	3,088.4	1,328.6	1,760.8	229.0	772.7	759.8			53.3	57.3
United States	6,228.6	3,624.2	2,664.3	489.2	Peculiar to South	2,175.1*	37.0	38.1	38.6	42.4
South's Percentage	49.6	36.7	66.1	46.8	99. X	**70.4				

*Includes standing renters, croppers, and share tenants.

**Percentage of all tenants exclusive of cash tenants.

tenure is short and the tenant cannot afford the necessary time and money to keep up a place he does not own."[10]

In short, the owners take part of the risk of production by taking the rent in a fraction of the yield. If the tenant is a cropper the owner also bears all the depreciation in tools and the risk of death of work stock. Lack of a rational form of tenancy has thus operated to perpetuate the low-standard farmers.[11] Anything that tends to discourage or restrict the entrance into farming of low grade laborers will greatly simplify competitive conditions and raise the standards of agricultural proprietorship.

The traditional scapegoat for all the agricultural ills the South is heir to has long been the Negro. Because he has furnished the majority of tenant labor within the cotton system he has had to bear the brunt of the blame for the system. This characteristic attitude is well set forth in a public address of a southern governor near the turn of the century:

> We have not diversified our crops because the Negro has not been willing to diversify. We have not used improved machinery on our farms thereby economizing expenses because the Negro is not willing to use such implements. We have not improved our soil because the Negro is not willing to grow crops to be incorporated into the soil, nor leave his cotton seed to be returned to the fields that he has denuded of humus and all possible traces of fertility. Because he is unwilling to handle heavy plows we have permitted him to scratch the land with his scooter just deep enough for all the soil to be washed from the surface, leaving our fields practically barren and wasted. We have not raised stock on the farm because the Negro is cruelly inhuman and starves the work animals we put in his hands for his personal support. We have accepted his thriftless and destructive methods simply because under our present system we have not been able to do without him. If this be true our present system in this relation is absolutely ruinous and it will not invite the residence of intelligent settlers from the outside."[12]

The Cotton System

It is but a partial answer to this criticism to suggest that the winning of the South was largely the work of the Negro and the pioneer. "Without the Negro the development of the southern states," C. C. Stack points out, "would have been retarded half a century longer until the great tide of immigration had flowed over the Appalachian watershed and covered the fertile reaches of the great Northwestern territory."[13] The expansion westward of the plantation system was due to nothing so much as the unremitting, back-breaking toil of Negro labor gangs. Bolstered by his tropical origin, his imagined immunity to malaria, he felled the forests, cleared canebrakes and thick underbrush, drained marshes and subdued to cultivation alluvial areas in a humid subtropic clime. With the area left to the normal processes of immigration, the pioneers who filled the upland forests would have left untouched much of this unhealthful lowland so well fitted for the cultivation of indigo, rice, sugar, and cotton.

More pertinent is the assertion that the characteristics of the cotton system and of the cotton growers can be traced to origins other than Negro shortcomings. To lay the blame for the "whole miserable panorama of unpainted shacks, rain-gullied fields, straggling fences, rattletrap Fords, dirt, poverty, disease, drudgery, and monotony that stretches for a thousand miles across the Cotton Belt"[14] on the inherent traits of a minority and once subject race is to claim too much. Opposed to the näive biology which thus accounts for the agriculture of a great domain is a rounded cultural interpretation. The geography, the seasonal cycle of plants, the economics of production and marketing, the social organization of a region—none of these things remains without influence and imprint upon its human denizens. Habits and attitudes which these factors condition are often attributed by those who disapprove to inherent willfulness or original sin. That cotton culture first on the plantation and afterward in the tenancy system conditioned and perpetuated the traits of which the governor speaks may be inferred from the fact that similar habits and attitudes are held by white croppers, tenants, and small farmers.

An analysis of the cotton system and the cotton complex is sufficient to show this. A definite set of practices surrounds the crop. Cotton is produced with (1) a large proportion of expensive credit, (2) in connection with a small percentage of other crops, (3) under a system of supervision and regimentation as in plantation and tenancy, (4) calling for a maximum amount of manual labor much of which is furnished by women and children. Moreover, (5) in prosperity cotton creates a vested interest in credit institutions to maintain it, (6) in times of depression, it enables failing farmers to continue in the cotton system by receding to the lower levels of tenure, and (7) at all times it encourages speculation, over-expansion, and over-production. Finally, (8) the crop is sold in a marketing system which the growers do not understand and over which they exercise little or no control.

The cotton system may be defined as the complex organization of financing, growing, and marketing cotton. It thus includes croppers, tenants, small farmers, and planters who comprise the growers, plus the banks, supply merchants, factors, and fertilizer dealers who finance the crop, and the local buyers, general buyers, coöperatives, shippers and exporters who assemble and classify cotton for sale to the mills or for export. As far as it is integrated the cotton system is organized around the method by which it is financed. In periods of prolonged depression this system tends to break down, only to reorganize in periods of rising cotton prices.

Deeply rooted in the cotton economy is the element of risk. As a Secretary of Agriculture once pointed out this is implicit in all farming:

> The farmer supplies the capital for production and takes the risks of his losses; his crops are at the mercy of drought and flood and heat and frost to say nothing of noxious insects and blighting diseases. He supplies hard, exacting, unremitting labor. . . . Then there is the risk of over-production and disastrously low prices. From beginning to end the farmer must steer dextrously to escape perils to his profits and indeed to his capital on every hand.[15]

For cotton there exists a cycle of production initiated by acreage planted and determined in its outcome by the weather and the weevil. The yield per acre averaged over the whole belt has varied from 124.5 pounds of lint in 1921 to 222 pounds in 1897. Within the last fifty years the average income per cotton acre has ranged from $10.78 in 1898 to $60.62 in 1919, while the farm price per bale has explored the ranges between $25 and $155. Seven times between 1890 and 1928 a decrease in American production has occurred, and five times it has resulted in an increased total money value of the shorter crop. For the seven years a total decrease of 22,900,000 bales has meant an absolute increase of $406,800,000 in crop values. A decrease in production of 23.4 per cent then brought a 12.9 per cent increase in total value of the seven crops. To put it another way, eight low-price bumper crops since 1890 have been followed by eight attempts to cut acreage. For these years an average reduction of 11 per cent in acreage has resulted in an average of 25.2 per cent reduction in crops with a 33 per cent rise in cotton prices. Thus the original variation of eleven per cent has been tripled in the final price effect. Conversely the increases in production caused equally violent downward movements in the market.[16]

To the farmers of the South these cycles result in incomes subject to great vicissitudes. The danger to credit institutions and to standards of living lies not so much in the low incomes as in tragically irregular incomes. The averages in Table XVII show for example crop incomes not greatly below national standards. Robert H. Montgomery offers the following record of the income

TABLE XVII

RECORD OF A 160-ACRE COTTON FARM IN MENARD COUNTY, TEXAS, 1894-1909*

YEAR	Number of Bales of Cotton	Average Price per Pound in Cents	Total Money Income in in Dollars	Percentage of Income of Previous Years
1894	9	4.50	202.50	. . .
1895	5	8.25	247.50	122
1896	5	7.00	184.03	75
1897	16	5.00	412.25	224
1898	15	4.60	405.37	91
1899	13	6.50	628.75	155
1900	51	6.50	1982.50	315
1901	23	7.00	1039.00	53
1902	19	8.50	1059.50	102
1903	25	9.75	1738.30	164
1904	23	8.35	1332.25	77
1905	16	9.75	1194.60	90
1906	28	9.60	1588.80	133
1907	7	10.00	350.00	22
1908	41	8.25	1832.57	575
1909	8	13.55	772.80	42

*From Robert H. Montgomery, *The Cooperative Pattern in Cotton*, p. 251.

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[15] James Wilson, U. S. D. A., *Yearbook*, 1910, p. 26.

[16] Carl Geller, "Fewer Acres and More Dollars," *Commerce and Finance*, January 12, 1927, p. 123. Vance, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-23.

of a family with eight boys and three girls on a Texas cotton farm. The acres in cotton were gradually increased from forty in 1894 to eighty in 1899 where it remained.

After the total of eighty acres came into cultivation (1899-1909) the income varied from $350.00 to $1,982.50. It dropped in one year from $1,588.80 to $350.00, then rebounded to the second highest figure of the period, $1,832.57, only to fall again the following year to 42 per cent of that amount.

We may reduce the whole story to one figure if we are addicted to quoting averages. Considering the income of each year successively as 100, the average deviation of each year as compared to the previous one was 82 per cent. The American Locomotive Company regarded by experts as showing a maximum of variability in corporation income possessed, as Montgomery shows, an average variation of 32.6 per cent in income for the same period.[17]

Cotton, moreover, is grown in connection with a small proportion of other crops. Thus the hardships of irregular income are made greater by the lack of home-raised supplies on cotton farms. Diversification in the Cotton Belt has been consistently preached in and out of season but it has never been attained. Basing her estimates on standard products excluding extras and luxuries, Miss Henrietta R. Smedes found in 1920 that Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, and Georgia purchased over half their food and stock feed from outside the state. Other southern states can be pointed out which rank but little higher. Some index of the extent of diversification of the 2,550,407 farms in ten cotton states in 1920 may be found in Table XVIII. These figures are manifestly inconclusive in that they do not point out whether such farms produce less or more than enough for their needs.

This excessive reliance on one crop in an area suited to many is due in part to the peculiar fitness of cotton as a money crop in credit economy. The South is situated at some distance from the market centers of the world. Because cotton is non-perishable and combines the advantages of high value in small bulk it can bear transportation to distant world markets. It fits no less into the crop lien system. It is food for neither man nor beast and can be devoured neither by the tenants' mules nor his children. It must be ginned before sale and in the check up of neighborhood gins the landlord may protect himself against theft before settlement. A stock farm may suffer loss from ill treatment of animals but "any fool can grow cotton." Thus when no credit is forthcoming for diversification or mixed farming, landlords and supply merchants can always be found to stake the cotton farmer from cropper to planter.

Then again the peak loads of man labor in cotton come exactly at times when other crops need attention. Cotton is not yet adequately mechanized and its planting, chopping, and picking cannot be shifted or speeded up by machinery. The National Association of Farm Implement Manufacturers estimated in 1924 that modern machinery had saved American farmers 1,382,000,000 days of work in one year. These figures, if accepted, provide for the 10,953,158 persons listed as engaged in farming in 1920 an average saving of 127 days a year. But a small fraction of this saving fell to the lot of the cotton growers. Depending on yield, it requires 30 to 100 hours of human labor to pick an acre of cotton. The amount of farmer's time required to pick an acre of cotton would grow three acres of corn in Iowa or four acres of wheat in Kansas. Hand picking is the neck of the bottle which retards the application of machinery to planting and chopping. The machine does the work of many men and pays their labor return to its owner. Cotton's hitherto successful defiance of the machine has kept the

TABLE XVIII

FARMS GROWING SPECIFIED PRODUCTS IN TEN COTTON STATES, 1920

Rank		Number of Farms on Which Produced	Per Cent of Farms
	All Farms	2,550,407	100
1.	Corn	2,250,580	88
2.	Eggs	2,049,996	80
3.	Home Gardens	1,953,160	77
4.	Cotton	1,872,326	73
5.	Milk Cow	1,605,074	67
6.	Chickens	1,599,427	67
7.	Butter	1,377,681	54
8.	Hay and forage	1,167,489	46
9.	Pigs	1,111,863	44
10.	Sweet potatoes	1,069,110	42
11.	Cane for Syrup	607,962	24
12.	Irish potatoes	545,014	21
13.	Oats	364,901	14
14.	Pure bred animals	134,441	5

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[17] Robert H. Montgomery, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-52.

cost of production extremely high and has drafted women and children to work in the field. According to 1920 figures, 19.8 per cent of all females ten years of age and over on farms in ten cotton states served as field laborers. The Census of Occupations probably underestimates the number of women engaged in agriculture. Of the 1,084,128 women so listed, in the United States in 1920, eighty per cent were found in ten cotton states. Of every hundred women field laborers 68 were Negroes and 32 white.

Add to this fact that the crop is produced with a large proportion of expensive credit. A Federal Reserve study in 1923 found that only 12 per cent of the cotton producers were able to finance the entire growing process without aid. From 50 to 90 per cent, depending on the locality, "borrow in the spring and continue until the cotton is marketed." The forms of security most used are, first, personal notes with one or more endorsements, second, mortgages on live stock, and, third, crop liens. Bank credit at interest rates averaging around 8.5 per cent is available for only the upper groups. Much of this comes to the growers at second hand through fertilizer dealers, landlords, and supply merchants. An examination of the studies available in this subject indicate that tenants and croppers may expect to pay around 25 per cent interest for this credit. Thus the grower's standard of living is lowered by the fact that one fourth of his expenditure during four to eight months goes into interest charges rather than consumers' goods. On the other hand the creditor has assumed in a single crop system both the production hazards and the market risks of the cotton grower. His extension of credit verges on pure speculation and high interest rates are his only protection.

It can easily be seen that in time of prosperity the credit institutions possess a vested interest in the cotton system which tends to perpetuate it. What is not so often realized is that in times of depression and failure the same system provides for the survival and perpetuation of the failing cotton farmer. He may fall to a lower level but he survives as a cotton producer. Croppers can enter the system empty-handed and compete against owners. They will have houses, lands, teams and tools furnished. Growers may fail and pass their losses on to merchants, landlords, and creditors but they will be furnished somehow and grow cotton the next year. The workers comprise the first charge on the industry. The cotton system like the Lord will provide, and under the "benevolent feudalism" of plantation and tenancy the inadequate producers will continue to overproduce cotton. The dire want following the initial devastation of the boll weevil furnished the first great exception to this condition and is held to account for a general exodus of Negro farmers from the eastern belt.

At all times there exists in the cotton system a tendency to expansion and overproduction. The lure of the cash crop meets a simple routine to which workers have been trained by long habituation. When new lands open up as in West Texas there is a completed culture complex with its human factors ready to occupy for the cotton system. The attitude ranges all the way from the simple desire of the farmer for more land to grow more cotton to make more money, to plans like the following for an unassailable monopoly for the South.

> This threefold increase of the crop (to 30 million bales) can be brought about by increasing, by means of improved agriculture, the productivity of the land, and by reclamation of land along the Mississippi Valley. If this increase could be accomplished; if the labor could be found to handle it; if the markets for it could be secured in such volume that the price could remain near to its present standard; and if our capacity to spin and weave our share of the increase could be maintained, the Southern States would become the richest portion of the earth. The opportunity to develop the potentialities of cotton in field and in mill, to train and handle the labor involved in the development which would cover the whole field of the poor white, the immigrant and the Negro, to evolve the financial genius to move and market his world staples, makes of the Southern States a field for industrial talent and industrial leadership unsurpassed in the world.[18]

Such a view ignores the competing cotton areas of the world, areas which in the opinion of many students are becoming of increasing importance.

COTTON CULTURE COMPLEX

In the expansion of cotton cultivation the Southwest has gained at the expense of the old Cotton Belt. The area west of the Mississippi first forged ahead of the eastern areas in 1920 while the only eastern state to show consistent gains in cotton acreage is Mississippi. In speaking of the cotton culture complex we have confined our attention to the Southeastern, Gulf, and Delta sections where practices are more nearly standardized, leaving other developments to be treated in a chapter on the Southwest. We shall also find the traits in cotton culture more nearly uniform in regard to the small farmer so often characterized by twenty acres and a mule. Average cotton acreages per farm growing cotton in the Southeast are small, ranging, for example, from 13 for Tennessee to 20 for Georgia. We shall find that characteristic traits of cotton culture appear as responses to environment rather than responses to race. Croppers, tenants, and small owners, whether white or black, have developed pretty much the same practices and ways of living in the eastern portion of the Cotton Belt. The one exception to be found is the plantation zones of the Mississippi Delta which deserves special treatment in a later chapter.

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[18] James A. B. Scherer, *Cotton as a World Power*, pp. 312-13.

To focus attention on a specific area will serve to make definite the picture of the common man of the South as cotton farmer. For 1924-26 the Department of Agriculture made a most illuminating study of the living conditions of white cotton farmers in a Piedmont county of Georgia.[19] There can be found on a comparable basis within this area 52 counties in the old Cotton Belt none of which has a population less than 75 per cent white. The Department estimates that perhaps 100,000 families in and along the borders of the southern Piedmont live no better than those here described. Here in a population six sevenths native-born white, we find that two thirds of the farmers are tenants on farms valued at less than $2,000 each. The average farm family consisting of five members consumed for family living, goods to the amount of $687.14 in value. Their cash expenditure for food during the year was about $22 per person. On the average, 57.6 per cent of the living, $396.07, was supplied from the farm. Their average net cash income was $424 per family. This was made from farms which averaged eight acres in cotton, thirteen in corn, and four in other crops. Croppers, who made up one fourth of the farm population, cultivated on the average 24 acres; tenants, 26 acres; and the landlord with his tenants, 48 acres. Only one work animal was found on 40 per cent of the farms and only 14 per cent had

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[19] Howard A. Turner and L. D. Howell, "Conditions of Farmers in a White Farmer Area of the Cotton Piedmont," 1924-1926, U. S. D. A. *Circular* 78, 1929, p. 47.

over two. After they had paid ordinary living expenses averaging $291 per family, these farmers had left $133 to be applied to debts or added to their capital.

Although these people have developed but meager wants, their needs easily exceed their incomes. Thirty-four per cent of the families live in houses of one thickness of lumber while only 26 per cent possess automobiles or have their houses screened against flies. The expenditures of the average family for books, magazines, recreation, amusement, education, and religion amounted to $24 per year. It was almost equalled by their only luxury, $15 per year for snuff and tobacco. In the use of automobiles for private purposes farm owners spent fourteen dollars, renters, six dollars, and croppers less than one dollar a year. Most of these farmers attended churches whose ministers were farmers, themselves, serving practically without remuneration. Their wants would be much more scantily supplied but for the fact that 92 per cent of the housewives have cheap sewing machines and make part of the clothing for the family. The exodus of young people from these farms is increasing. Forty-seven per cent of owners' sons who have grown up have left the farm to go into other occupations besides agriculture. Only 29 per cent of croppers' children leaving home, however, have deserted agriculture.

A study of conditions in a cotton area of North Carolina reënforces the conclusions arrived at in the Piedmont county of Georgia. It vividly points out differences between land owning and landless classes, white or black, in cotton culture. In many instances the small cotton grower falls short of attaining standards of comfort or even decency. For those who possess a gift for figures, Table XIX compiled by Carl C. Taylor will afford, at a glance, a clear cut picture.[20]

The socially developed traits in this complex are well known. Out of this background one may expect a high degree of mobility. A study by the Department of Agriculture in 1922 estimated a shifting of occupants on 19 per cent of all farms in the United States, 27.7 per cent of tenants and 6 per cent of owners moving. In eight cotton states, however, 30 to 40 per cent of all farms showed a change of occupants. Having nothing to lose, tenants

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[20] Given in Dwight Sanderson (ed.), *Farm Life and Farm Income*, p. 148.

TABLE XIX

TABLE SETTING FORTH ECONOMIC STATUS AND RESULTANT SOCIAL STATUS OF DIFFERENT ECONOMIC CLASSES IN TYPICAL TENANT CROPPER AREA*

	OPERATOR LANDLORDS		OWNER OPERATORS		TENANTS		CROPPERS	
	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black
Equity per family	$14,494	$8,974	$3,998	$3,908	$886	$226	$352	$126
Equity per person	$2,750	$1,019	$889.00	$597.00	$177.40	$37.68	$ 72.15	$24.83
Per cent who are insolvent	0	0	0	0	6.5	28.5	24.2	18.75
Annual cash income per individual	$425.65	$226.82	$253.82	$253.03	$174.45	$118.51	$143.13	$125.64
Average number of rooms per home	5.6	3.8	4.5	3.8	4.2	4.0	4.1	3.4
Per cent of homes with running water	6.6	0	0	0	0	0	1.7	0
Per cent of homes with lights other than oil lamps	10.2	0	0	0	3.5	0	1.7	0
Per cent of homes with kitchen sinks	10.2	20.0	0	0	1.3	0	0	0
Per cent of births at which doctor was in attendance	76.0	33.3	72.5	28.6	57.5	8.3	48.0	14.6
Per cent of parents who can read and write	81.8	80.0	80.0	90.0	86.5	35.8	70.8	42.3
Per cent of families who take papers and magazines	83.4	60.0	65.0	60.0	55.4	7.4	50.0	17.9
Average number of books in homes	15.2	0.8	1.4	20.2	2.69	1.5	2.24	0.6
Number of times members of family have participated in recreation during year	3.04	.79	1.73	1.97	1.40	.25	.92	.38
Per cent of families who own automobiles	92.9	60.0	45.0	60.0	49.4	14.3	34.5	16.96
Per cent of parents in favor of consolidated schools, road bonds, college education, etc.	59.4	36.7	46.7	73.5	45.3	14.3	41.1	17.4

*Data from *Economic and Social Conditions of North Carolina Farmers*, Carl C. Taylor and C. C. Zimmerman, Bureau of Economics and Social Research, North Carolina State College of Agriculture, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1922.

are easily led to move by a desire to secure better land or more agreeable landlords. Tenants, however, usually move within their own immediate neighborhoods. Only a fifth of 1,370 moves in a Georgia county were found to involve distances of ten miles or over, while 29 per cent were for less than two miles.

The lack of ownership in house or farm encourages shiftlessness as well as mobility. Possessing by law no right in his tenancy and no claim for improvements made, the cotton renter has acquired a shiftless attitude toward the place in which he lives. This is borne out by the common complaint by landlords of houses started on the road to ruin, fences torn down for firewood, and lands lacerated by erosion. With nothing to lose and all to gain, the tenant may adopt a policy verging on exploitation and expropriation.

Cotton has created another culture pattern for the South. The seasonal and cyclical nature of his money income not only serves to give the cotton grower a shifting standard of living but throws him back upon credit and prevents his acquiring habits of thrift. After a season of deprivation and close living on niggardly credit comes the sale of the crop and cash income to be husbanded if possible until the sale of next year's crop. The income of the cotton grower has its peaks of high prices but these peaks are not planned for and they do not serve to level up the general standard of living. In the Cotton Belt luxuries are likely to be bought on the spur of the moment during a good season in cotton and to be paid for in the poverty of next year's living. One can neither exercise a systematic thrift, budget expenses, nor indulge in installment buying on irregular returns from cotton.

The Cotton Belt, it may be concluded, offers the spectacle of a region in which the culture of a plant has deeply impressed the mode of life and characterized the habits and activities of its people. The cotton plant lays down an annual cycle of activities concerned with planting and cultivating, gathering and marketing of the crop which in turn has its effect upon social life and institutions. Thus the school, the church, and the community agencies find their seasons of intense activity during the two respites of cotton culture, for a few weeks in the late summer between the last chopping and the first picking and for two or three months in the winter between the last picking and the preparation of the ground for the next crop. The demands for hand labor perpetuate the field work of women and children, place a premium on a high birth rate, and otherwise affect the standards of domestic life. The demands of the cotton crop are greatest at precisely the period required for tending other crops and thus impede diversification. Furthermore, since cotton is food for neither man nor beast and cannot be disposed of except through the local gin, it furnishes an excellent basis for the crop lien system of credit which in turn further fixes the tradition of the one crop system upon the Cotton Belt and tends to limit the diet of the cotton farmer to the deadly monotony of meat, meal and molasses.

The cotton farmer is peculiarly subject to speculative risks of the market since his is one staple grown in America that can contribute nothing directly consumable by the farm family. Thus without adequate diversification, the risks of the market combine with the risks of the weather and the weevil to make the climb to ownership all the more difficult, to encourage speculation, to perpetuate tenancy and its attendant evils, inadequate housing, inefficient methods of agriculture, isolation, dependence on credit, backward community institutions, illiteracy, mobility, shiftlessness, and lack of thrift. Chained by inability to finance experiments and diversification, southern agriculture seems bound today to landlords, supply merchants, and credit institutions who hold the economic keys but are powerless to unloose the captive.

Devotion to cotton, belief in its expansion, lack of coöperation in planting and production programs continue. It cannot be claimed that by nature southern farmers are inept and shiftless. It is, for instance, the experimental activities not of technical agriculturists but of farmers themselves that introduced rice production on the Louisiana and Arkansas prairies, the culture of bright tobacco into South Carolina, and Spanish peanuts into the cornfields of Georgia.[21] Moreover, southern farmers have led many excursions in trucking, orcharding, and specialized farming only to witness local production expand beyond local markets and pull ruin down upon their heads. There is a needed and necessary place for cotton as a cash crop in southern agriculture. It is also possible that cotton can in the future be sufficiently mechanized to still its voracious demands for hand labor. If so, the unique features of cotton culture may be pruned off and the plant may come to occupy a normal and a legitimate niche in a balanced economy. Any adequate discussion of the rationalization of cotton must, however, be postponed to our chapter on regional reconstruction.

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[21] H. H. Bennett, *Soils and Agriculture of the Southern States*, p. 13.

THE PLANTATION LABOR SYSTEM

V

THE PLANTATION LABOR SYSTEM

"YES, it's bad, but do you know of anything better that would work?" These words, spoken by an Arkansas planter, are typical of the opinion of Southern plantation owners about the tenant system. Despite Government efforts designed to implant simultaneously a system of small individual holdings and a plan of mechanized coöperatives, the cropper system remains almost unshaken, except by increased use of wage labor.

Before the Civil War, planters from Eastern states settled with their slaves along the bottom lands of the large rivers of Arkansas. Later on, sawmills cut much timber in the lowland sections, leaving more fertile land open for plantation cultivation. During this period the Civil War put an end to slave holdings; therefore it became necessary to devise a new system of labor. The combination of three factors—the scarcity of capital, the need of workers by the plantation owners, and the need of livelihood by the former slaves—found a solution in the tenant system. Individuals providing only their labor were given land to work on halves; i.e., they received half of the crops produced by them on their land. Those who furnished their own equipment and work stock were given three fourths of the cotton and two thirds of the corn. Freeing the slaves was the beginning of the tenant system. As good land rapidly grew scarce, renters supplemented sharecroppers.

Sizable plantations worked by tenant labor have been the basis of Southern agriculture to this day. The plantation is as deeply rooted today as at any time in the history of the South.

To have a clear understanding of the system, or the problem, it is necessary first to become acquainted with the nomenclature of the various types of labor in the modern plantation. On top there is the "planter," or owner. Generally the owner is also the manager; absentee ownership is rare these days, despite propaganda to the contrary. Under the owner or manager, in a large plantation, there are "farm managers." On the Willey plantation of 5,100 cultivated acres there are five such managers, each one with a separate part of

the plantation.[1] In addition there may be "riding bosses," who are usually Negroes acting in a supervisory capacity over day labor. The highest form of tenant is the "renter," who supplies all operating capital in addition to the labor necessary for making and harvesting the crop. Usually the renter pays a fixed sum of cash to his landlord, retaining the entire crop, but in some cases his rent may be a portion of the crop. Renters are not ordinarily found on large farms, but often a planter or manager will supplement his own farm income by buying a small place and installing a renter on it.

The next lower rung in the agricultural ladder is occupied by the "share tenant." In addition to working and harvesting the crop, this man supplies operating capital, such as work stock and farm implements. He may pay part of the other production costs. In Arkansas he usually pays one fourth of his cotton and one third of his corn as rent. Share tenants are seldom employed on large plantations; in all Delta areas they are greatly outnumbered by the sharecroppers. On surveyed Arkansas plantations in 1934 it was found that share-tenant farms averaged 29.1 acres, while cropper farms averaged only 16.3 acres. However, cropper families outnumbered tenants 1,226 to 241.[2]

At the bottom is the famous "sharecropper" who furnishes man-labor to make and harvest the crop, pays a very small part of the other production costs, and receives one half of the crop. The sharecropper usually bears one half of the cost of seed, poison—if poison is necessary, fertilizer, and ginning.

"Wage hands" work for money wages by the day or by the month. They have no crop of their own. Regular wage hands or wage families live on or near the plantation; seasonal wage hands are transported back and forth from the towns and cities to work during the chopping and picking seasons.

Also there are various other types of labor. Large farms have a blacksmith, a hostler, and one or more mechanics. A bookkeeper and a commissary manager are necessary if the plantation has a com-

[1] All large plantations are split up into subdivisions, generally called "places." Thus the Willey farm is composed of Gilliland, Dugger, Hoo Jay, Swan Lake, and Dillingham places. The names of such subdivisions are taken from names of former owners, as Gilliland; from natural features, as Swan Lake; or in exceptional cases from Negro imagination crystallized into tradition, as Hoo Jay, which is, as far as anyone knows, meaningless. By far the greater part of subdivision names are taken from those of former owners or managers.

[2] Blalock, *Plantation Operations of Landlords and Tenants in Arkansas*, pp. 19, 21.

pany store. During the late fall, extra mechanics are needed to operate the gins. All these men are incidental, and their jobs are not sharply defined. In many cases, during a year a man may be called upon to serve in several different capacities. The bookkeeper on the Willey plantation manages a small gin during the ginning season, and he also does some work in the commissary during the summer. Therefore an intensive discussion of these secondary workers is not necessary here.

The extensive use of wage labor is a recent development. While sharecroppers declined 36.8 per cent in number of families per 10,000 acres of cropland in Chicot County, Arkansas, from 1932 to 1938, wage families increased 74.7 per cent.[3] Share tenants also lost heavily in numbers. The percentages, of course, are for a particular county only, but the trend of tenant displacement has been consistent throughout the South. Plantations are employing more resident wage labor, and more temporary wage labor during the peak seasons. Also on most farms sharecroppers supplement their share incomes by doing wage work. The tendency toward this partial shift, whereby the sharecropper is given a smaller acreage of individual cropland, and increased employment as a wage hand, is very strong today. Such is the case on the Willey Planting Company, where tenants are given the opportunity to add to their small incomes from decreased cotton acreage by performing day labor on other crops at the rate of $1 a day. The labor organization of the Cornerstone Farm and Gin Company, Cornerstone, Arkansas, is even more advanced. Thirty-five per cent of the total cotton acreage is worked by day labor, leaving 65 per cent for the 107 cropper families on the place of 4,780 acres, 1,560 of which are in cotton. Corn and the other crops are split equally between wage hands and sharecroppers.

During the picking season, and generally during the hoeing and chopping season, more than a hundred day hands, nearly all women, are brought down from Pine Bluff to Cornerstone every day. They work from six to six; during the chopping season they are paid 75 c. to $1.25 and during picking time they receive 75 c. to $1.50 per hundred pounds picked. The variation in price paid for labor is due to a number of causes. Among these is the weather; if the early summer is very rainy, choppers are urgently needed. If most of the cotton crop matures late, pickers are urgently needed to strip the fields before the rains and cold of the late fall. Perhaps the most important factor is the price paid for cotton; but the general prosperity of the town is also significant, for, since most of the pickers are women who seek domestic employment as cooks or maids, the numbers available for field work are greatly reduced by increased domestic employment and wages. A Negro woman can ordinarily make more money picking cotton than she can as a house servant, by the day. Consequently during the fall, if high prices are being paid for pickers, many Southern matrons find themselves doing their own cooking until their cook comes back, muttering something about "being well again."

Such action tends to result in a top limit on day wages, but often in a particularly bad year planters engage in cutthroat competition for the town labor market. In Pine Bluff there are six main "congregating" corners and crossroads for the day labor (all Negroes, incidentally, as are nearly all the sharecroppers in the Delta area). At four in the morning, the women, with a sprinkling of men and boys, begin to assemble. Four or five large plantation trucks are already there. The Negroes go from truck to truck asking, "How much you paying?" They take the best offer; if all are the same, as they frequently are, the women work on the farm where work will be the easiest, where they have worked before, which has the "best water," or which gives them better treatment in other ways. The Cornerstone Farm and Gin Company has a good reputation among the Negroes and usually has little trouble in filling its trucks. After a truck has taken on its quota at the main interior market, it moves toward the outskirts of town, stopping at smaller corners to pick up more workers. Then it heads for the plantation—about thirty miles away in the case of Cornerstone—and arrives there shortly before six.

As the season progresses, a farm tends to acquire a specific group. The truck driver learns to know most of the Negroes whom he can expect to go with him. The formation of habits of working on particular places lessens the severity of the competition for labor. Some women have worked on Cornerstone almost every day during the chopping and picking seasons for years.

Such loyalty is the exception. As more farmers find their cotton strangled by Johnson grass and weeds, or find open bolls rotting in the rain, more trucks come to town. As the labor supply is not sufficient for all, some go back empty, or nearly so. The next day, the previously unsuccessful up the price. All others have to follow suit. If the labor supply is still insufficient, the price rises further. The destructive—to the planter—competition elicited the following suggestion from a prominent Jefferson County planter: "We ought to get together and let each man get a share of the pickers—none of this bidding the price up." Such a combination in restraint of trade is practicably impossible; there are too many plantations for the supply of pickers at 75 c.

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[3] J. G. McNeely and Glen T. Barton, *Land Tenure in Arkansas: II. Change in Labor Organization on Cotton Farms.* Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, Bul. No. 397 (1940), p. 11.

The recently increased use of wage labor has been a result of two factors: the increase in mechanization, and the Agricultural Adjustment Act. The former is discussed fully in another chapter, but the latter needs clarification. By decreasing the cotton acreage, the AAA made the farmers turn to other crops, most of which require far less man-hours of work than cotton, and are suited to machine cultivation and day labor. An example is lespedeza, which is sown, cut, and harvested entirely by large and expensive machines run by day labor. Share-crop methods are not economically practical on this and many other crops. Corn is another example; Negroes do not like to work corn; in the old share-crop pattern it was difficult to force them to work it. Under the modified system, the powers of persuasion of $1 a day over resident wage families and sharecroppers who need "cash money" are more than sufficient to insure proper cultivation of company corn.

Another important factor is the AAA payment. Under the tenant system, the planter must divide the payment with the cropper. Using wage labor, the planter retains the entire payment. In many cases the added benefit is sufficient to make the use of wage labor more profitable than that of sharecropper labor.

A recent experiment in Mississippi County, Arkansas, found that the operator's per-acre cash returns over variable expenses using wage labor were $8.93 more than returns on comparable sharecropper acreage.[4] This is a purely local investigation and does not hold true for the rest of the Delta areas of the State. But, in general, a system of wage labor has proved more economical than a strict share-crop system.

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[4] Ernest J. Holcomb, *The Sharecropper and Wage Laborer in Cotton Production* (U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1940), p. 37.

The relative advantage of the wage over the cropper system depends upon several factors. Among these are the nearness of the farm to a center of population, the wage rate and availability of labor in the city, the yield, and the price of cotton. The first factor is of considerable importance in obtaining seasonal nonresident wage labor. Clearly, a farm close to Pine Bluff, which is a city of 25,000, is at a much greater advantage in securing extra labor than a plantation which can draw only from a town of 5,000 which is thirty miles away. For this reason, farms isolated from centers of population use a very small percentage of wage labor. Naturally in districts where seasonal labor may be secured the wage rate looms significant. It is generally agreed that on 12-14 c. cotton if the wage level rises above $1.25 a day or a hundred pounds of cotton picked it is cheaper to use cropper labor. Some set the maximum lower. The present war boom in Pine Bluff[5] will result in a shortage of farm wage labor and a corresponding rise in the wage level which may well make wage farming unprofitable in comparison with cropper farming.

The yield and the price of cotton and seed are the final factors which must be considered. Other elements considered as constant, the relative advantage of wage labor over sharecropping varies directly with the yield and the price. In years of good crops and high prices the day-labor planter will be far richer than his counterpart who sharecrops his land, for the former will pay out only a fixed amount but will receive all the benefits of heavy production and high price, while the latter will have to share his good fortune with his tenants. In ordinary times, high-yield farms, such as those in the Delta areas, may make the shift from share to wage labor with more facility than those on poorer soil.

But the converse is also true. In times of poor crops and low prices the day-labor planter will suffer much more than his rival, for he has made a far greater cash outlay. Also,

> It is still necessary to chop and hoe the cotton by hand and to utilize hand labor in picking the crop. The fact that these operations have not been mechanized has, in all probability, been responsible for a reluctance on the part of plantation operators to adjust completely their resident labor organization in line with increased mechanization of other opera-

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[5] An $80,000,000 incendiary-bomb and gas arsenal is being constructed near Pine Bluff. Ten thousand new workers have moved to town. Also a large primary training field has been constructed there. Despite Mr. Henderson, the town price level has risen greatly; labor is hard to get at any wage.

tions. Plantation operators feel that it is too great a risk to employ only such resident labor as is needed for crop operations other than picking and chopping, and to depend almost entirely on seasonal, off-farm labor for the latter operations.[6]

Therefore a compromise has been effected, which is exhibited in the quasi-share labor system of the Willey Planting Company, and in the use of both day and share labor on the Cornerstone Farm and Gin Company. The latter is the more widely used labor system in the Delta sections of Arkansas today.

Thus far, the discussion of the two labor systems has been conducted entirely from the managerial viewpoint. The laborer has strong feelings on the matter. From a 1939 study, "A decided preference for the sharecropper status is noted . . ." among both croppers and resident wage families.[7] As a whole croppers enjoy an income advantage over wage workers. In 1937 the average annual income of cropper families having a full-size share crop of cotton (14.2) acres was $468.87, while that of wage families having no separate cotton acreage was only $365.74.[8] But wage laborers who are tractor drivers or engaged in other specialized work have a much higher income than the average sharecropper, because of higher wage rates paid for jobs demanding special skills and because of steady work throughout the year. The number of these workers is limited. Wage laborers have some advantages in that their income is relatively steady, while the cropper must depend on credit advances until his cotton is sold in the fall. But this and other small advantages are not sufficient to sway both croppers and wage hands in their firm conviction that cropping is the more desirable way of life.

But croppers do not necessarily feel that the system of which they are a part is a good way of life. Nor does the Nation. Wallace was correct when he said,

> Undoubtedly, most Americans want to maintain our agriculture on a proprietary, landowning, family basis. . . . It is not desirable to have either a peasant agriculture manned by tenants and laborers, or a collective agriculture run by the central Government.[9]

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[6] Glen T. Barton and J. G. McNeely, *Recent Changes in Farm Labor Organization in Three Arkansas Plantation Counties.* Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station (1939), p. 15.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[9] Henry A. Wallace, "The Year in Agriculture," *Yearbook of Agriculture, 1937,* p. 2.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

43 • A SENSITIVE PERSON'S FEAR

That the following poem appeared in the staid, thoroughly respectable Atlantic Monthly *reveals a great deal about American social thought in the winter of 1931-1932. Florence Converse, "Bread Line,"* The Atlantic Monthly, *CXLIX (January, 1932), 55-56. Used by permission of the publishers.*

WHAT'S the meaning of this queue,
Tailing down the avenue,
Full of eyes that will not meet
The other eyes that throng the street,—
The questing eyes, the curious eyes,
Scornful, popping with surprise
To see a living line of men
As long as round the block, and then
As long again? The statisticians
Estimate that these conditions
Have not reached their apogee.
All lines end eventually;
Except of course in theory.
This one has an end somewhere.
End in what?—Pause, there.
What's the meaning in these faces
Modern industry displaces,
Emptying the factory
To set the men so tidily
Along the pavement in a row?
Now and then they take a slow
Shuffling step, straight ahead,
As if a dead march said:
'Beware! I'm not dead.'
Now and then an unaverted
Eye bespells the disconcerted
Passer-by; a profile now
And then will lift a beaten brow,—
Waiting what?—The Comforter?
The Pentecostal Visitor?
If by fasting visions come,
Why not to a hungry bum?
Idle, shamed, and underfed,
Waiting for his dole of bread,
What if he should find his head
A candle of the Holy Ghost?
A dim and starveling spark, at most,
But yet a spark? It needs but one.
A spark can creep, a spark can run,
Suddenly a spark can wink
And send us down destruction's brink.
It needs but one to make a star,
Or light a Russian samovar.
One to start a funeral pyre,
One to cleanse a world by fire.
What if our bread line should be
The long slow-match of destiny?
What if even now the Holy
Ghost should be advancing slowly
Down the line, a kindling flame,
Kissing foreheads bowed with shame
Creep, my ember! Blaze, my brand
The end of all things is at hand.
Idlers in the market place,
Make an end to your disgrace!
Here's a fair day's work for you,—
To build a world all over new.
What if our slow-match have caught
Fire from a burning thought?
What if we should be destroyed
By our patient unemployed?
Some of us with much to lose
By conflagration will refuse
To hallow arson in the name
Of Pentecost. We'd rather blame
The Devil, who can always find
For idle hand or empty mind
Work to do at Devil's hire.
The Devil loves to play with fire.
We'd rather blame him,—ah, but this
May be just our prejudice.

14 • SOUTHERN SHARECROPPERS: THE AGRICULTURAL DEPTHS

Sharecroppers in the cotton belt, never a prosperous group, suffered from economic want during the 1930's as perhaps did no other group in America. On January 5, 1932, Congressman George Huddleston of Alabama told the so-called LaFollette-Costigan committee of the Senate of some of the conditions in his district. Federal Aid for Unemployment Relief, Hearings *before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Manufactures, United States Senate, 72nd Cong., 1 sess., on S. 174 and S. 262 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), pp. 244-245.*

MR. HUDDLESTON. We have a great many tenant farmers there. We have a great many negro farmers, and practically all of them are tenants. Their ability to survive, to eat, to have a shelter, depends upon the ability of the landlord to supply them with the necessaries of life. They have a system under which they make a contract with the landlord to cultivate his land for the next year and in the meantime he feeds them through the winter, and at the end of the year they gather their crops and pay for their supplies and rent, if they are able to do so. Conditions in agriculture have been such for several years that the landlords have been gradually impoverished and their farms are mortgaged to the farm-loan system and to the mortgage companies in a multitude of instances.

In a very large percentage [of cases] the landlord is now unable to finance these tenants for another year. He is unable to get the supplies. He has no security and no money with which to feed and clothe his tenants until they can make another crop. They came to the end of the season—their chief crop is cotton which they sold at from 5 to 6 cents, and very few of them were able to pay for the supplies that it required for them to make the crop. They owe the landlord. Many landlords have said to them, generally, "Keep what you have made and go your way. I can not feed you another year. You will have to do the best you can, but keep whatever you have made." A great many of these landlords, no matter how well intentioned, are incapable of financing these tenants another year. The landlord is in almost as bad shape as the tenant. He owed for the supplies. He had to take what he received at the end of the season and turn it over to the merchant, or to the bank to pay them what he owed. He has been unable to pay in full, so that he can not advance them another year. Many of these people, especially the negro tenants, are now in the middle of a winter, practically without food and without clothes, and without anything else, and how are they going to live? Many of these local counties have no charitable organizations. They are poor people and impoverished. They have no county funds. There is no place to turn, nobody that has any money that they can turn to and ask for help.

Many white people are in the same kind of a situation. They beg around among their neighbors. The neighbors are poor and they have no means of helping them. They stray here and there.

Any thought that there has been no starvation, that no man has starved, and no man will starve, is the rankest nonsense. Men are actually starving by the thousands to-day, not merely in the general sections that I refer to, but throughout this country as a whole, and in my own district. I do not mean to say that they are sitting down and not getting a bite of food until they actually die, but they are living such a scrambling, precarious existence, with suffering from lack of clothing, fuel, and nourishment, until they are subject to be swept away at any time, and many are now being swept away.

The situation has possibilities of epidemics of various kinds. Its consequences will be felt many years. The children are being stunted by lack of food. Old people are having their lives cut short. The physical effects of the privations that they are forced to endure will not pass away within 50 years and when the social and civic effects will pass away, only God knows. That is something that no man can estimate.